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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY
JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF
'THE EXPOSITORY TIMES,' 'THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE'
'THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS'
AND OTHER WORKS

ASSISTED BY
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PSALMS III

"THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE" OFFICE
ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND
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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, re-arranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM

THIS is the classic in the literature of penitence. No poem or prayer equals it in depth of feeling or ardour of utterance. It has proved itself both a challenge and a solace to innumerable men and women who in a lightning flash of self-revelation have been filled with self-loathing and longing for reconciliation with God. Perhaps no other passage in the Old Testament has been so continuously in the hands and on the lips of those of the New Testament era. The 'De Profundis' (Ps. cxxx.) is comparable to it, but is less personal and swiftly soars to hope.

I

Yet we are conscious of the scrutiny of the probing modern mind, ever on the quest for reality. Questions concerning it are asked to-day which no other century has asked.

Is it tinged with Oriental violence of speech corresponding to Oriental exaggeration of feeling? The contrast in the mourning customs of the East and of the West points the suspicion. The hour-long wailing of the East, which mourners used to feel to be a necessity if the proprieties of sorrow were to be observed, warns us that possibly some deductions should be made if we are to distinguish the reality from its expression. There are some Psalms which a Western writer, as truly inspired, would have expressed differently; low moans would have taken the place of loud laments. But such suggestions fall pointless as we read these words. This Psalm does not shriek; it is full of sobs. Its misery of penitence, its deep humility springing from an almost intolerable sense of humiliation, ring true. It is human, not Eastern, in its short, restrained, intense expressions of mental agony.

A further question arises. Is it at all morbid? Is it touched with the hypochondria of a man obsessed by sin? There is a shallow 'healthy-mindedness' which makes this assertion. It would relegate this poem to the literature of the pathology of the human spirit. The question answers itself for any one who knows the deeps of our human nature. The writer is not so much obsessed with his sin as possessed with his longing for God. No man has the right to criticize it who has not launched his soul with unswerving purpose to press close to a holy God and found his sins rise like mountains between him and the goal of his desire. Let the shallow minds keep to the shallows. This Psalm is for the masters of the soul and for all who have dared to form moral judgments concerning themselves. It is well to remember what a modern writer in a literary review has recently asserted: 'Most of us make but one or two moral judgments in the whole course of our lives; and often we do not really make a moral judgment even on such occasions, though we may think that we do, but only decide between our own inclinations and the conventions of the society in which we live.'

No, this is more than an authentic human document. It is a revelation of the depths of human nature confronted by God, intensely realized.

II

We cannot rely on the heading to this Psalm any more than we can rely on the headings to the other Psalms. But there is no doubt that its source is some special transgression.

The writer is conscious of some failure in goodness which appals him now that he has cast aside self-excusing and permits himself to know his fault unscreened. He feels defiled. He breathes uncleanness. All the corruption of his nature has come to a point of expression which forbids any hope of cleansing by effort of his own. It is as if he had leapt into an ill-smelling marsh, the stench and filth of which pervade him. He did not abide there; he has crawled to its edge, but he carries with him the stain, the malodour.

In another respect the penitent's situation

resembles that of David after Nathan had convinced him of his sin with Bathsheba. The Psalm gives the impression of emergence from a struggle against the compulsions of conscience. He has been trying to excuse himself, to explain away his sin, to urge that God's condemnation was extreme. Now he ceases all defensiveness. 'Thou art just in thy charge and justified in thy sentence.' It is this yielding after long resistance that gives the high tension of feeling to sentence after sentence. As has been wisely remarked when the phrase, 'a man after God's heart,' was criticized as inapplicable to David, 'He was great in penitence and that is well pleasing to God.'

Whether this suggestion of prolonged resistance to the accusing voice be justified or not, the utterly unconditional surrender of this sinner is noteworthy. 'Well do I know my offences, my sin is never out of my mind.' So many men live a flaccid life. Their very sins are lifeless. They drift into evil and drift out of it. Their penitence is stagnant. Their prayers of confession have no urgency. They have never discovered that their pervading fault is their futility. This man is vital whatever he does. His repentance is a rushing torrent.

But these two features are not the most remarkable. Such a sense of defilement has been paralleled in many when a sudden breach has been made in their moral life, as by the first sexual offence on the part of a man with a godly upbringing. And there have been dramatic conversions not a few which resulted in their form and passion from at first 'kicking against the goad.' The original features of the Psalm are not so immediately evident. First, this man is acutely conscious that his fault is against God. It is *sin*, something different from crime or vice or misdoing. Second, he passes from horror at his one sin to horror at his pervading sinfulness.

III

(1) 'It is against thee I have sinned, I have done evil in thy sight.' That is the torturing thought. He has spoiled his fellowship with God. He has become loathsome to the all-seeing One. The holiness of God is remote from many of us to-day. Failure we acknowledge only too readily; for we regard it as excusable failure, not as offence against a supreme standard, against a Person whose mere presence demands perfect life and perfect motive. We say 'We have done our best,' and are content though our best may be equalled by another's worst. And it is the anti-social sins which trouble our conscience most.

This man is not unconscious of the evil wrought upon others, for he cries, 'Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God.' Even if we translate, with Dr Moffatt, 'Save me from mortal sin,' the outlook is outwards as well as upwards. But it is not with injury to his neighbour or to society that he is chiefly concerned. 'Banish me not from thy presence, deprive me not of thy sacred spirit'—that reveals the unbearable possibility which haunts him. He is afraid he has lost God for ever. Reinstatement in goodness of life, recapture of lost reputation, renewal of moral achievement—these count for nothing unless he can be sure that God has welcomed him again into intimacy unclouded.

(2) This demand seems to him almost impossibly great because his discovery of one sin has led him to the acknowledgment of a universal taint and disgrace. 'Ah, 'twas in guilt that I was born, 'twas in sin that my mother conceived me.' 'Hide thy face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.' The last trace of self-complacency is shattered. Unclothed, unarmoured, unweaponed, he lies before God. He has neither resources, nor merits, nor offerings to present. He knows himself without excuse, and without resource.

He does not harbour for a moment any complaint against God because from the beginning he was weighted with imperfection. The one clear fact in the darkness is the impossibility of a sinful man having with God the undimmed communion for which he longs so intensely. This leads him unerringly to a twofold plea, wrung from him in his agony. There is no greater mistake than to discuss his phrases as contributions to theology. They are the raw material of religion, intuitive, not reasoned but none the less reasonable.

IV

His first plea is that God must do anything that can be done. He can only bring his infinite longing, his intense self-condemnation.

'In thy vast pity wipe out my offences.' 'Hide thy face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.' He has no kind of theory of an atonement. He brushes aside the thought that sacrifice can be of any use—'Thou carest not for sacrifice.' He is not concerned with the thought of God's justice. 'O God, as thou art kind, have mercy upon me.' He is not 'thinking things out,' as we say, he is feeling things out. His hope is in what he perceives about God for himself. 'A heart broken with penitence never wilt thou despise.' It is a father and a friend he has lost. His one thought is recovery of a lost fellowship, unutterably sweet. Only God can restore that to him. Somehow his sin has to be made as if it had never been. His agony drives him to ask the apparently impossible.

His second plea shows how thoroughly he has felt his way into the rightness of things. Joined with his prayer that his sin may be obliterated between God and him is this other prayer for fundamental inward transformation. 'Wash me from every stain of guilt'; 'Wash me whiter than snow'; 'Make me a clean heart, O God, and put a new steadfast spirit within me.' This is his necessity. It is not enough for him to dream of being welcomed again by God; he must be made fit to be welcomed. He must have a guarantee in himself that this awfulness of a broken fellowship can never recur. The only guarantee is inward renewal. More than a new start he asks. A new nature is what he craves.

In these two requirements we discover the essentially evangelical nature of his appeal. What he asks is just what the message of the Cross guarantees to us—reconciliation with God and a transformation of our being. At the Cross because of the Divine Sacrifice—veiled in mystery though it be—we see the reasonableness of expecting God to treat us as if we had never sinned and to put us on the road of escape from sinning. The notable fact in this Psalm is the daring appeal for what God Himself had planned to bestow before that plan had been disclosed. The Evangel of Jesus Christ is precisely adapted to the necessities and longings of a sinful heart, by this writer so deeply felt. But it was a miracle of moral insight to declare so clearly what for most of us only the Cross of Christ has made plain. We see our desperate need in the light of God's way of dealing with sin. This penitent saw what God must deal with though the great deed was as yet unaccomplished.

V

We cannot but ask the question, 'Did this troubled conscience find peace?' We can at least answer, 'He is on the way to peace.' The mere fact that he has been led to pray as he does shows that he is on the high road to recovery of what he had lost. He could not thus plead if God had banished him. His pleading is a proof that his contrition has already been accepted. He could not thus feel if God had forsaken him, for his feeling is much more than black despair. He longs for God; not for what God can give him, but for what God can be to him. That desire is the token of hope.

And the dawn of hope is in the Psalm, though the dawn breaks slowly and uncertainly. He cannot yet say with Micah, 'Thou delightest in mercy,' but he is near to it. 'O Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise,' means that he expects the release of heart which is a fountain of thanksgiving.

It ought to be added that another hallmark of evangelical experience is to be found. The poet asks for the experience of God's mercy that he may be able to help others. He is 'anxious not to go to heaven alone.' 'Gladden me with thy saving aid again and give me a willing spirit as my strength, that I may teach offenders how thou dealest, till sinful men turn back to thee.' Intensely preoccupied as he is with his own need of God, still his misery leads him to think of the misery of others. His purpose is to use the new experience of endowment and release for which he hopes so as to show to those like himself the way of escape and of blessed relief. He would not have had this purpose unless he was on the way to possession of the experience. It is not a repayment of God's kindness he promises. There is no bargaining from beginning to end. He foresees the inevitable result of experiencing that kindness. There will be an urgency in his soul which will drive him to testimony.

VI

This Psalm has been regarded here quite frankly as a record of personal experience.

There are students, deserving respect because of their erudition, who construe the whole poem as a record of national penitence, poured through the channel of a single heart. They regard it as if written by an Isaiah who cried, 'Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips and dwell among a people of unclean lips.' Their contention is that here we have a mingling of a man's sorrow for his own sin with his sorrows for his nation's sin. One can only answer that so intensely individual a prayer proves itself to be purely personal. If it be, as some modern students declare it to be, chiefly an outpouring of national penitence, it is safe to say that it is unparalleled. As well declare that St Paul was not uttering his own private experience in the seventh chapter of Romans.

Are we, then, to resent these last two verses? (They are clearly an addition after the Exile: 'Grant happiness to Sion by building up Jerusalem's walls again; then wilt thou welcome the due sacrifices, and on thine altar bullocks shall be slain.') I think not. They certainly belong to another world of religious thought and feeling, but they remind us how many ways of honest approach there are to God. And they stand there as a warning for all who attempt to improve upon this Psalm of human experience.

Clearly some pious lover of the ancient ritual made the mistake of supposing that the poet's urgency of soul had diminished the honour of the Temple worship when he cried, 'Thou wouldst not have burnt offerings from me.' It is the mistake already noted, of reading theological statements into the outcry of a soul afire for fellowship with its God. But just because these concluding words have been allowed to stand, we had better accept them humbly both as a warning and as a completion, clumsy though it be. God has many ways of fulfilling Himself, and it is not every soul who comes to Him by the shattering revelation of the depth of human need. There are other ways, whereby other men come home to God. One way is the message of the sacrifices, dim symbols but pointers towards the Cross.

R. C. Gillie.

The Value of Moral Sorrow

Ps. li. 3.—'My sin is ever before me.'

It will be granted by all that this Psalm is the expression of a deep and true experience: but there are those who may think that it gives too dark a view of the religious life. It will be granted by all that there must be a time in every life, if it is ever to be brought into bondage to Jesus Christ, when the man can think of nothing else but his sin against God, when he shuts out all gaiety from his soul and dwells alone with himself, enduring in solitude those private waves of light and waves of darkness which pass over him whom God hath chosen: but it is generally supposed that, when such a time has once passed, it need not return again—indeed, that it may be taken as evidence of want of grace if a man continues to look back and vex himself with the sins of his youth.

But what if the man answer, 'I would rather remember my sin: I need to remember it: I am never so near to God as when the memory of my sin steals back into my heart. I am never so good a man, never so clean, never so free from vanity, I am never so sure of Christ's compassion towards me personally, as when the old foolish days pass before me and I watch them passing with my heart sore, I do not know whether with sorrow or with gratitude and prayer!' A man may make that answer if we ask him to forget his sin; and if he speaks in such a way there is no denying him. Each one knows for himself the atmosphere in which he lives the best and holiest life. Each one knows or ought to know the kind of sky which best suits his soul. There are some souls which, like ferns, grow best in the shade. They are not at their best in the light.

If a life is ever to be very serious and deep, and if it is to remain real in its testimony to God, that life must always keep within the call and rebuke of its own experience of God. It must have its roots set firmly in one spiritual crisis which, either because it was the man's first experience of God or because it was his most unmistakable experience, was really the significant crisis of his life, the authentic word of God to him. All his after life must be built upon that decisive experience, must be the unfolding, the expression, the deeper appre-

hension and fulfilment of what came to the man in that great day of his soul. A true spiritual career can have only one root. If the man forgets his own great experience and rushes hither and thither trying to support his own religious life with odds and ends from other people's experiences, he has ceased to have any personal religion; what he has is only a thing of scraps, like a book of cuttings compared with one real outpouring of the soul. When you enter a cathedral—if you are sensitive to such influences—you are conscious of one distinct feeling, one impression; and as long as you remain within its walls that one impression keeps growing upon you. The building is great and affecting because it is one. It is loyal in every detail of it to the conception of the whole. It expresses one thought about God and man's relation to God, and nothing is admitted which would conflict with that thought. And so our lives assuredly would be truer, more real, and would bring with them a surer testimony to God, if we were more faithful to our own personal history, more faithful to our own most serious hour and to the vision or word of God which came to us then. *That* we should have ever before us.

Let us now consider certain good results, certain holy influences, which come to those who continually acknowledge their transgressions, who have 'their sin ever before them.'

1. In the first place this exercise makes us think more truly about ourselves: it reminds us of what we are. There is a good deal in the circumstances of each of us that hinders us from seeing ourselves truly, from seeing ourselves in the same way as God sees us. Our success in the world and in a worldly way depends not so directly upon our character, upon our inner worth, as upon our ability, upon the strength of our mind or the cunning of our hand. And therefore a man is apt to judge himself, not by his moral and real worth, but by those powers of body or of mind which have enabled him to make his way in the world. His judgment of himself is based upon his success as a man among men and not upon his rank as a man among saints, as a man before the Cross of Christ, which is God's test of true manhood. This, at least, was what our Lord meant when He said, 'How hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kindgom of heaven!' For it is hard for any one to accept God's judgment of him and to put aside the world's flattering opinion. And it is not only riches that may prove a snare. A man may deceive himself about himself because he has some talent or ability or genius which makes him excel. He may judge himself by what he has, not by what he is—though this last is God's own point of view. That is the danger, and here is a way of escape: 'My sin is ever before me.' That is the wave of thought which must ever wash over us and keep us pure and simple. That thought will eat through the unreality which is always gathering about us and will lay open the deep places of our life to God.

2. A second good result or holy influence comes to those who have their sin ever before them. By this exercise they become more kindly towards others, and especially to such as have failed in this life or have made shipwreck of themselves. Nothing is so needed in this world as a sustained charity—the spirit which hopeth all things. Even Christian hearts become hard and proud. It is a real danger for the religious that we forget the way by which we came; we incline to fall out of sympathy with sinners. We forget the terrible bondage of evil habit; we forget the renunciation which is the first step towards holiness. It was the Lord Himself who said, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.' He admitted that, from the point of view of those who are outside, the true life is as hard as if a man were asked to cut off his own right hand. There is no habit which so entirely delivers us from the snare of security and from that kind of unfeelingness towards those who are not yet settled in their faith and obedience as this—'To have our own sin ever before us.' By this means we are less likely to lose our early humility and that sense of our own utter dependence upon the mercy of God with which we came to Christ.

¶ When John Wesley was re-crossing the Atlantic on his return from his mission, he was greatly troubled concerning his own unseemly conduct and his unworthy conversation with his fellow passengers on board. He therefore resolved 'never to speak to any one who might oppose him, or who might sin against God, without having all his own sins set clearly in array before his face.' When Livingstone was asked

how he contrived to treat the treachery and villainy of African natives and Arab traders with such infinite patience and extraordinary calm, he quietly remarked, '*I have faults myself*!'[1]

3. The third good result or holy influence which comes from having our sin ever before us is that we keep near to Christ and think of Him eagerly and with joy. 'To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.' If our lives are kept sober by the thought of our sins, they will always be looking towards Christ with a certain entreaty and faith. They will always be gentle, reverent, obedient—having that atmosphere which comes of real goodness, that bearing and manner which they have who are still in touch with some deep personal experience.

In these qualities, in these signs of the Presence of Christ with us, we fall far short of what is possible and what God intends. We slowly take up a wrong attitude towards Christ. We become intimate with Him rather than dependent upon Him. We speak His name lightly as if He were One of many, not reverently as One from whom comes all our salvation. And though we do not observe our own tone, the world does. And when we use words as if Christ were all in all to us, they simply do not believe us. For they do not feel thrilled by the tone of reality and fresh feeling. Why are these things so? Why has Christ faded from many a face; why has the devotion and reverence gone out of many a voice? Is it because we have forgotten our sin, the sin from which He delivered us, the sin in spite of which He loved us?

'To have our sin ever before us'—that is not a counsel which serves to make us abject. No: it is a private discipline which works within us a new devotion to Jesus Christ, a new and entire consent to the life of faith. It is an exercise which brings indeed sorrow, yet not sorrow so much as reality and deliverance from small cares. It is the beginning of a new health and soundness, and the feeling, too, that again we are genuine and simple before God. We dwell for a time under the shadow of the Almighty, and when the shadow passes, it is with us as it is with a garden when in hot weather the clouds gather and break gently and then pass—the sun comes out with new glory, the grass is greener and the birds sing more sweetly on the branches.

¶ Those who know Dante will remember how, when he came into the last circle of Purgatory on his way heavenward, he was taken to the brink of two rivers, and given their waters to drink. The first was Lethe, a draught from which cleared the memory of all its stains and scars, its shadows and its corruptions. The second was Eunœ, whose waters brought back to the mind all the happy, soul-lifting recollections of bygone days. With profound insight into the deepest facts of our nature, the great poet there teaches us that God's last, best gift—the key to the soul's true heaven—is a regenerated memory. But where shall we find the true Lethe and Eunœ of the soul? God in His infinite mercy has provided us with them. God's Lethe is His forgiving love. It flows, sweet and vivifying, from beneath the Cross of our Redeemer. And those who drink of these healing waters are relieved from the incubus of their evil past. Not by forgetting, but by transfiguring the mistakes and failures and sins of the days of old, does this heavenly secret of forgiveness do its blessed work for the soul. And Eunœ? What is this but the certainty of God's gracious leadership and kindly discipline? When once we realize how that Hand has led us, and preserved us, and kept us till now, how life's strength has flowed from His sustaining grace, how He has peopled every day with the memorials of His love—then how brightly do even the sorrows of the past shine as we gaze down the chequered vista of our experience![1]

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 73.

Sin against God

Ps. li. 4.—'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.'

This Fifty-first Psalm has been adopted by the Christian Church as the most adequate exposition of her religious feeling in penitential seasons. And yet it is no mere liturgy for days of humiliation, not a mere penitential psalm designed to guide the devotions of sorrow-stricken sinners to the end of time, not simply a Miserere; certainly it is all this, but it is much more, even the real utterance, the genuine outpouring, of a broken and contrite heart. It is this sense of

[1] E. Griffith-Jones.

reality that gives the Psalm its special value as an expression of penitential feeling. One feels assured that its author is thoroughly in earnest; that he is not describing the mental condition of an imaginary penitent; that he has not, so to speak, thrown himself into an attitude, for the sake of producing a hymn for the use of repentant sinners. These touching words are the outgrowth of true and bitter experience.

1. The Psalmist utters one of the great fundamental truths concerning human life—that sin is against God. He is perfectly aware that his sin has affected his fellow-men, that in the first instance it was directed against man. But he affirms, with the whole conviction of his soul, that it is against God that he has sinned. The truth on which he lays hold is that sin is a breach of the Divine order, a transgression of the Divine law, and that, whatever may be said or thought about its effects in the sphere of human relations, it is essentially rebellion against that holy Will which rules over all. This is the conviction of the Psalmist, and the conviction of all the saintly souls whose experiences are related in the Old Testament. It is the elementary truth of all religion, and is witnessed by every conscience. The very existence of conscience is evidence of a moral order we did not create, but to which we owe allegiance. The conscience may be ill-educated, it may misread the moral order, but its presence in us all is a witness to a law outside ourselves we ought to obey. It speaks with an authority we may ignore, but which we cannot deny. Is there anything stranger or more significant in human life than the fact of conscience, or the pains of a conscience ill at ease? It holds men back from deeds which it might be to their interest to do, and stings them into self-reproach and remorse if they commit them. Lady Macbeth, walking in her sleep and trying to wash the invisible blood from her hands; Jonas Chuzzlewit, hiding the body of his victim in the wood, and leaping out in terror as though the wood had eyes to observe his crime; Arthur Dimmesdale living a life of stainless purity, revered as a saint of God, compelled at last by his burning inward pain to take his stand by the one with whom he had secretly sinned—these are instances of the power of conscience, drawn by masters of the human heart. They are witnesses to a moral law above them which cannot be broken with impunity. It was not Duncan or Tigg or Hester Prynne against whom they felt they had sinned. It was the universe they had outraged that called for justice upon them. These are great examples, but conscience in every man witnesses to the same solemn truth. We sin against a fellow-creature, and if we are wise we attempt to undo that sin. But still conscience is not appeased. What was it that made the thing wrong? Not the resentment or the pain of the man we have injured. The thing would have been wrong even if we had failed to hurt, or if the person had been too magnanimous to feel resentment. We know that it was wrong because it was a breach of a moral law binding upon us, and him, and all men. God is the moral Governor of the world, or rather He is the moral order, the eternal Righteousness, and sin is always antagonism to Him.

¶ What a strange and now almost foreign conception is this of Tauler's and of Christianity, that the wrong we do is not done merely to ourselves or to others but to God, to something beyond ourselves and others! What a difference in kind there is between this and the modern idea of wrong, and how different must the daily walk of a man like Tauler be from our own! It is the addition of the dome of heaven to the earth.[1]

2. Sin is a breach of the Divine law. But, though men may acknowledge the truth of this, and a few feel it as an awful truth, it must be admitted that the great majority are not deeply moved by it. From vast numbers of people the sense of sin seems to have vanished. Bishop Gore in one of his most notable sermons says that in his judgment there can be no real revival of faith until there is a revival of the sense of sin. On all hands voices are heard telling us that a sense of sin is a morbid growth and that religion ought no longer to concern itself with the pathology of conscience. Let us have a healthy mind and a manly religion, a thing of joy and beauty, and not go digging up our characters by the roots and maundering over our shortcomings. As an eminent physicist put it in words not likely to be forgotten: 'The higher man to-day is not worrying about his sins, he wants to be up and doing.'

[1] Mark Rutherford, *Last Pages from a Journal*, 285.

¶ 'Modern feeling,' says Dean Inge, 'has gone back to the pre-Christian way of looking at evil, as an imperfection to be set right, rather than as a dark stain to be washed out in tears and blood.'

Many hindrances to penitence are to be met with. Doctrines of heredity, of evolution, of inevitably determined acts, are all around us. To some it has become an unthinkable notion that man can sin against God. Nor is it always easy to find a straight reply to their arguments. Once you grant the premises (and that is often done unconsciously) it all seems to follow. When Dr Johnson was being worried by Boswell on this topic of free-will his reply was, 'Sir, all reasoning is against it, and all experience is in favour of it.'

3. But there are two things especially which prevent our being moved as we ought by the truth that sin is against God. In the first place, we feel the insignificance of our lives compared with the life of God. We are finite creatures, and He is infinite. We are conscious of limitation and ignorance. What, for instance, is our knowledge compared with the eternal wisdom? When we think of God we are overwhelmed by His infinitude. And though perhaps we dare not give expression to the thought, we feel in our hearts that our sin cannot be of much importance to One so great. How can the sins of insignificant creatures in an infinite universe matter to Him who is so unutterably beyond our thought?

¶ Frederick the Great, Carlyle says, did believe in a God; but he assumed that he and his 'bits of affairs' could have no interest for Him.

In the second place, we do feel that our sins, if they hurt anyone, injure ourselves and our fellows. We feel that in the past men have said too much about sin against God or at least have overlooked the fact that it is man who is hurt. And when we see a man whose selfishness has made others miserable, who in his private life or in his business has made life harsh and cruel for them; when we see a man who has bruised and broken his fellows by his greed or lust congratulating himself that he has made it right with God, we rise in wrath against him. Made it right with God, with that distant and ineffable Deity, while his path is strewn with his broken victims! Can we wonder that many to-day are demanding that justice shall be done to man and that the complacent sinner should be compelled to right those he has wronged?

4. Are we, then, to cease repeating, 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned'? Are we to forsake the possibility of sharing in the experience of those who have cried in this way to God and have found peace? Not so. It is true we are no longer moved by the thought of the 'Moral Governor of the universe' as men were once. And after all, it is not the deepest truth about God. We must come to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ before we can say from our hearts, knowing and realizing to the full all the social consequences of our wrong-doing, 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned.' The cross of Jesus means many things, but it means this above all, that God is in the world, and that our sin touches Him, that it wounds Him and that He suffers. The cross of Jesus is the external manifestation of the unseen pain of God. It is not what God exacted from sinners, it is what sin exacts from God. God is infinitely near to us all; His love binds Him so indissolubly to each soul that it is impossible to injure man without putting Him to grief. The evil influences that flow from us have affected many, but in each one God has been bruised.

¶ Writing of the Maoris, Bishop Selwyn said: 'I am in the midst of a sinful people, who have been accustomed to sin uncontrolled from their youth. If I speak to the natives on murder, infanticide, cannibalism and adultery, they laugh in my face and tell me I may think those acts are bad but they are very good for a native; and they cannot conceive any harm in them. But on the contrary, when I tell them that these and other sins brought the Son of God, the great Creator of the Universe, from His eternal glory to this world, to be incarnate, to be a curse and to die—then they open their eyes and ears and mouths, and wish to hear more; and presently they acknowledge themselves as sinners, and say they will leave off their sins.'

¶ The bill of sin has not wholly been paid when reparation has been made to our injured brethren; there is still God to reckon with. Suppose as a parent you heard of some wrong to your son, and when you spoke to the one who

inflicted the wrong he should retort: 'What has it to do with you, the dispute is between your son and myself, not with you?' I fancy you would reply with indignation, even if your son was partly to blame, 'He who hurts my son, hurts me.' Nay, some would more strongly affirm, 'You have struck my son—no, not my son, but me.' God is our Great Father, and every wrong against man is also a wrong inflicted upon Him. This can also be applied to national and social evils. Wrong to the weaker sections of humanity is a wrong permitted or committed against God. James Russell Lowell states it succinctly in those well-known lines:

> He's true to God who's true to man;
> Wherever wrong is done,
> To the humblest and the weakest,
> 'Neath the all-beholding sun.[1]

Christ was God manifest, and the Cross is eternal. How full the New Testament is of this truth. 'They crucify the son of God afresh and put him to an open shame,' says the writer of Hebrews. And we know a little of what this means, for that is what we do when we think of sin as merely the violation of a code. Religion is above all things the friendship of the soul with God. The Christ is ours to live and die with, but ours also to desert and insult. Let our repentance, then, be real and deep; but also full of hope. Peter denied his Lord, and, when turned and broken, went out and wept. So must we; but we sorrow in hope, because we know that His love knows no dying, and is ever welcoming us back—provided we admit the nature of our acts, and say with the prodigal of old, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

Inward Truth

Ps. li. 6.—'Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'

In this Psalm we have the innermost cry of a man in his revolt against sin, and in his longing for holiness. He ignores the question of penalty for his misdoings; it is God he wants and the purity he has lost. No external act counts for anything; God measures by the inner rightness, so it is to this thought of truth that the Psalmist turns. 'Thou requirest truth in the inward parts.' It is as though he says, 'Had I been true, had I seen things as they really are, I should not have sinned, I should not have felt and yielded to the power and fascination of evil.' And in some measure we all sympathize with this conception. If we knew what sin is, if we saw it in its cruel power to cripple and defile, or if on the other hand we knew how near we are to God, and saw our own soul in its awful sacredness and wonder, fresh from the touch of Him who made it and visits it and destines it for Himself, we should never allow it to be so stained and broken. 'If thou hadst known'—there was the unconscious degradation of Jerusalem. So far, perhaps, Socrates was right in identifying virtue and knowledge, and it may be that of all human sin a greater than Socrates is saying to-day in His perpetual intercession, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

And if this thought of the paramount claim of truth is not so conspicuous in the Old Testament, we have but to glance at the pages of the Fourth Gospel to see how favourite a thought it was with our Lord. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' 'When he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all the truth.' How the heart of the poet of the Fifty-first Psalm would have leapt within him if, through the mist and silence of the intervening centuries, he could have overheard such utterances as these. Yet there is a remarkable foreshadowing of the insight of Christ Jesus in these words. They ring with that inwardness which is so clear a note of Jesus' moral teaching. We have been accustomed to think of the Old Testament as dealing with the outward sphere of action; we have been accustomed to say that it was Jesus who first ran down the act into the heart. But we must not separate the old and the new by any hard and fast distinctions such as these. They intermingle, both in creed and character. The Psalmist recognized God's passionate insistence that a man should be thoroughly sincere. And it is worth noting, too, that when he recognized this he had sinned, and was repentant; and a repentant man sees deep. There are some hours in life when we are blind; hours when we see

[1] Ernest F. Drew.

nothing and forget everything; and all our past, and all our honour, and duty and God, fade and are blotted out. But when repentance comes, we see again. We see what we have done and what we are. We touch a sinfulness far deeper than our act.

1. God insists on sincerity, not a superficial truthfulness but truth in the inward parts.

(1) It is always a hard thing to be sincere. Life is so full of little insincerities, like the gay motes that people the sunbeam, that it is often the man who is seriously struggling to be true who feels most keenly how untrue he is. If it is always a hard thing to be sincere, it is especially hard to-day. One cause of this is the *fierce struggle for existence* now. There is a fierceness in modern competition that makes it very hard for a man to be a man. There are so many interests involved, so many whirling wheels within the wheels, that to be true to self is difficult. Men are not free as the shepherd on the hills is free. Men are combined and interlocked in the great mechanism of modern life, until, at last, to say what a man thinks, and to be what a man is, is one of the quiet heroisms of the market. When to be sincere spells heroism, we must not wonder if insincerity is common. Few men are heroes. For one soul that has a passion for sincerity there are a hundred that have a passion for success. This and the compliances, and the accommodations, and the silences, have tinged much of our city life with insincerity, although it would be ungrateful not to acknowledge the fine honour and trust of much of our commerce.

¶ There are times when one cannot but feel a thrill of pride in hearing of the character of a fellow-countryman or the record of his doings; and I well remember one such occasion in Palestine when I was told of a Scots family, with an unpretentious Lowland surname, who carried on business for two or three generations in the port of Beyrout. So high and so widespread was their reputation for strict honour in all their dealings, that in the bazaars of Syria, even in the inland towns, two Arabs might be overheard clinching a bargain with a phrase which affirmed its solemnly binding character—the phrase, 'Black's word.' [1]

(2) The *power of common standards*, too, makes it hard to be sincere. There never was a time when the thought of the many was so quickly voiced and registered. For centuries the people had no voice. They lived and loved, and had their griefs, and died. But what their thought might be on the great themes mattered little to their rulers. Then came the awakening of intelligence, the dawn of power, the rising of the people like a giant, the vote, the newspaper; until to-day the thought of the people has been caught and voiced, and public opinion is a dominant power. It is an untold blessing. But the voice of the people is not always the voice of God, and in the tremendous pressure of a general opinion, it is harder for a man to be himself. It is a difficult thing to be an individual. We are so apt to be all warped and pressed out of the mental form that God has given us, until our life becomes a play-acting and all the world a stage, and we have not the courage to think, and we have not the heart to feel, and we have not the heroism to be, ourselves. And so losing our individuality, we cease to be sincere.

(3) Then, we are living in *a time of transition*, and this makes for insincerity. Old things are passing. Old truths have to be recast and readjusted. There is not a doctrine, whether of heart or of Bible, but earnest minds are trying to reset it in the larger knowledge of these latter days. It were impossible, it were utterly wrong, to cast away the past. It has meant too much for us, and been too much to us, for that. It were impossible, it were utterly wrong, to flout the new. It is the air we breathe. It is from God. So springs the temptation to be insincere.

2. Now, the penalty of insincerity is that it takes all dignity out of life, and makes this world a very mean place. We think that men will be tricked and never find it out. But that is not so. Better be passionate, better be inconsistent, better be dead than insincere. Peter was passionate, brimful of inconsistencies; yet if ever a true heart beat, it was the heart of Peter—and Jesus was Christ to him. But Judas, whatever his other sins were, was insincere, till he came to feel the very sincerity of Jesus like an insult. And another penalty is that no sin so surely saps and undermines our influence. Perhaps we think we have no influence. Most of us think far too much of our abilities, and far too little of our

[1] G. F. Barbour, *Addresses in a Highland Chapel*, 112.

influence. We are so interwoven in the web of life that we are making and moulding each other every day. In ways mysterious, out of the depths of this mysterious self, we touch and turn each other. And perhaps the men who influence us most are the men who never tried to influence us at all. Now the one bolt that falls out of the blue to shatter this unconscious influence of character is insincerity. We may be ignorant, and men may not despise us. We may be narrow, and still command respect. But, ignorant or learned, narrow or broad, once let men feel that we are insincere, and all our influence for good, and for God, is gone. Let a minister have the eloquence of Paul; but if his people distrust him there will be no changed hearts. It is God's curse on insincerity.

¶ 'I was once minister of St Matthew's, Glasgow, and found there an intense affection for Dr Stalker, the preacher with whose name that church will always be associated. Many things in him, I discovered, won his people's hearts, but perhaps most of all his honesty—the fact, as they would sometimes say, that he never in prayer and sermon said more than he actually meant and felt. I remember one man telling me how he followed him down to the church on a most wretched day, with inches of slush melting upon the streets, and a persistent drizzle falling through a touch of fog, and how he asked himself, "What will the Doctor do when he reaches the prayer of thanksgiving? He does not look thankful, creeping along there ahead of me. Will he leave it out: or will he do the formal thing, and for once utter what he does not mean?" But, as he proudly confessed, he need not have feared. For, when the time came, the prayer opened, "O Lord, we thank Thee that it is not always as bad as this!" And, starting from that damp wretchedness they were all feeling, he pictured life as it might have been, "always like this," and then kept heaping up the endless joys and gladnesses that God's infinite goodness has thought out for us, and that make this little life of ours so big, so splendid, so inexhaustible, till the soaked folk were lifted clean out of their gloom and dumpishness into a rapture of thanksgiving, and their hearts were up above the clouds in the full sunshine round God's feet. But nothing, so my friend assured me, could have done it, but that first bluntly, almost comically, honest sentence, which faced facts.

'Always any touch of posing, unreality, sham, closes the people's hearts, unless they, too, unconsciously are hypocrites. Here above everywhere is it true, as Carlyle used to urge so vehemently, that the first essential is sincerity.'[1]

3. How are we to get an inward truthfulness?

(1) One essential is *detachment of mind*, a deeper reverence for ourselves. What cowards we are with regard to the opinion of others! You will find time after time men and women, who think themselves free, living under the most degrading tyranny of fear as to what will be thought of them by others. Not to care at all what anybody thinks is inhuman, but to be bound by a kind of trembling terror as to what people will say or think is a degrading slavery.

¶ It is clear from Bishop Wilkinson's recorded words that no man was ever more intensely sensitive to the least breath of opposition or hostility; he instinctively desired and valued the good opinion of the world. But he valued his conscience and his message more, and never modified the truths he had to tell; while his very sensitiveness kept him from ever presuming or dictating, and gave him an instinct for conciliation which was never blunted.[2]

¶ Let not thy peace depend on the tongues of man, for whether they judge well of thee or ill, thou art not on that account other than thyself.[3]

(2) And if the first essential is detachment of mind, putting aside self-consciousness, which is very often other-people-consciousness, the second secret is *an increasing consciousness of God*. It is because our God is distant from us that we dare be one man *within*, another man *without*. We must gain a closer fellowship with Christ. Of all the helps whereby we struggle onwards towards sincerity, there is none like daily fellowship with Him. If it ennobles us to live with noble souls, how will it shame us into a new sincerity to live with the truest heart that ever beat! There is one Man whose very company kills insincerity, and that is Christ. When we are near to Him, and He to us, we are proportionately true.

¶ During Mr Gladstone's last tenure of office

[1] A. J. Gossip, *In Christ's Stead*, 222.
[2] A. C. Benson, *The Leaves of the Tree*, 119.
[3] Thomas à Kempis.

as Prime Minister a clergyman, whose only opportunity of knowing Mr Gladstone had been through the not too trustworthy descriptions of hostile critics, happened to say in the presence of Dean Church that he believed Mr Gladstone was a thoroughly insincere man. The Dean was sitting in his chair when the remark was made, but he instantly rose, his face even paler than it usually was, and he said, evidently with the strongest suppression of personal feeling: 'Insincere! sir, I tell you that to my knowledge Mr Gladstone goes from communion with God to the great affairs of State.' It was high testimony to be given to any man, but highest of all when we remember who gave it.[1]

This is Love's nobility,—
Not to scatter bread and gold,
Goods and raiment bought and sold;
But to hold fast his simple sense,
And speak the speech of innocence,
And with hand, and body, and blood,
To make his bosom-council good.
For he that feeds men serveth few;
He serves all who dares be true.[2]

Penitence

Ps. li. 9, 10.—'Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'

1. Is it not striking the difference between the language of this Psalm and that in which mere moralists are wont to talk of sin? To the religious mind the sins of the past seem to cling around us—to be a burden that must be removed, a pollution that must be washed out, a bondage from which we must be set free. The sin and the remedy that it demands alike present themselves almost as physical facts. It is impossible to speak of them without using physical metaphors, and the cruder forms of religion have ever been prone to treat and interpret the metaphors as literal realities, and to devise expiations, purifyings, sacrifices, compensations of all kinds, which are supposed to take away sin by a quasi-physical operation. And religion of a more spiritual cast, while it has always insisted upon the impossibility of effecting moral purification or renewal by such means, has at least seen in such processes true symbols of the spiritual change for which it yearns. But when we turn to the moralists—even to moralists of a lofty and spiritual type—we often miss what is characteristic of the language of religion. We hear no more about forgiveness, or removal of past sin, but rather of moral improvement, of progress, of high ideals. The past, we are often reminded, is unchangeable and irremediable. We are encouraged to look forward to the future. Instead of the half-despairing cry that something should be done for us, that a burden which is crushing us down should be removed, we are rather reminded of our own freedom, our power to do well now, no matter what we have done in the past. The intrinsic goodness and strength rather than the evil and the weakness of our own nature is set before us.

Now, if we deal honestly with ourselves, we must admit that in some ways the teaching of the moralists comes home to us. We feel the vanity and the impotence of the old attempts to get rid of the past. If we have made other lives miserable or base, no repentance, no oblations or satisfactions of ours will turn those marred and wasted lives into lives of joy and goodness. The money that we have wasted in foolish self-indulgence will not come back, nor the good that it might have done be done now, because we have repented. And even in ourselves the seeds of ill that the ill deeds have sown will still now and again be springing up and bearing their evil fruit. And we feel that so far it is not merely reason, common-sense, experience that are on the side of the modern view, but also that, to a certain extent, these truths are the very teaching of Christianity itself. The uselessness of all attempts to blot out the past by ceremonial rite or outward oblation is one of the characteristic ideas of St Paul and of the Epistle to the Hebrews. And when we come to examine the teaching of our Lord and His apostles about repentance, we feel that the very word that they employ for repentance emphasizes up to a certain point the teaching of the moralists—that the past is beyond recall; it is the present that is important. It is not *metameleia* that they preach—merely wishing you had not done what you have done—but *metanoia*, change of heart, becoming a new creature. It is a significant little fact that one of the very few places

[1] *Life and Letters of Dean Church*, 304.
[2] Emerson.

in which the word *metameleia,* the ordinary pagan word for being sorry for a thing afterwards, is used in the New Testament is in connection with the remorse of Judas. The very essence of the teaching of Christianity is, then, that the important thing is what we *are* now—not merely what we do, but what we are.

¶ Repentance knows no half-measures. It is not the correction of this little failing or that little failing. It is not patch-work. It is renovation of the whole state, and the whole nature, and the whole personality—renovation through and through, and out and out. That is what Bishop Wilson meant when he wrote, 'There is no repentance where there is no change of heart.' That is what Martin Luther meant when he spoke of repentance as 'a real bettering and change of the entire life.' That is what St Paul meant in his doctrine of the 'new creature.' This is what the Saviour meant when He said to men, 'Change your mind'—not merely change your actions or your habits, but your mind, your thoughts, your aims, your inner attitude, your very self. 'Look to thy repentance,' writes Richard Baxter, 'that it be deep and absolute, and free from hypocritical exceptions and reserves.[1]

If the heart is really changed, God will not impute the past. It is a free pardon that is proclaimed by the teaching of Christ, not a pardon on some elaborate conditions, whatever forms they may take. For it is not arbitrary—this proclamation of pardon which Christianity, in spite of all attempts to obscure it, has carried with it. If God be really Love, if all that He desires is that men should be good as well as happy, He cannot be thought of as exacting retribution for the past, when it would do no good to the altered character. Punishment is not inconsistent with love, if only the punishment will do good. Although the sinner has repented, and God accepts that repentance, there may still be room for discipline, for the improvement of the character by suffering. The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is, then, no arbitrary doctrine, but one that springs immediately from the central truth of God's nature, the truth that God is love.

2. Christianity then, rightly understood, does not contradict the views of the moralists by its teaching about sin. And yet, after all, do we not feel that there is something about sin, about repentance, about the need of renewal, which the moralists have left out of sight? Why do religious teachers insist upon repentance, upon sin as a sort of positive thing which we have to fight and to escape from, or forgiveness as something which is somehow to get rid of that thing? Why cannot we simply take the view of moralizing common sense and say, 'Never mind about the past; just do your duty now, and don't bother yourself with anxious scruples and morbid reflections?' The answer depends upon taking a true view about sin, about repentance, about forgiveness.

(1) *Sin.*—What this common-sense moralizing is apt to forget is that a sin does not disappear simply because the particular bad act is past, and has not been and perhaps is not likely to be repeated. The sin reveals a defect of character, and the defect remains until the character is really altered. And if the character be really altered, the alteration must show itself in genuine hatred of the past sin—a hatred which is at once the condition and the expression of real change of character. That hatred should be ever growing deeper and deeper as the love of goodness grows stronger and stronger. And that hatred cannot grow unless we sometimes think of our past sins—enough at least to know what they are and what is the character which they express. Brooding over past sins is unprofitable enough, but we must think enough about them to make us ask ourselves, 'Are we really better now? Under the like temptation should we not do the same again? Or, are not the things we indulge ourselves in now, in principle, of exactly the same kind?'

(2) *Repentance.*—True repentance is the change of character itself. That is the thing that we want to strive after. And therefore repentance is not a thing that can be got over and done with, either at some great crisis of our life or at stated intervals, all-important as such stated times for self-examination and new beginnings really are as an aid to spiritual growth. Such opportunities are valuable just because repentance is a life-long thing, which ought in a manner to be always going on, as the formation of character ought always to be going on. For, if it is the Christian character that is being formed, growing hatred of evil,

[1] F. H. Dudden.

especially of the evil that is or was in our own hearts, is an essential part of it. The brighter the sunlight, the deeper and blacker grow the shadows. And if our repentance is to be of this kind, it is clear that it will come, not by brooding over the past, but by lifting up our hearts to higher ideals, aspirations, examples. Is not that one meaning of the Atonement, that it is by looking away from ourselves to the highest and purest embodiments of ideal human nature, and especially to the greatest of them all, to Him in whom we recognize the fullest and completest revelation of the character of God Himself—that it is in that way that men are saved from their sins?

¶ In that most affecting of all pictures of closest human friendship and love, Ary Scheffer's 'St Monica and St Augustine,' it is not into each other's eyes that mother and son are gazing. But, by a device which no one who did not know St Augustine's *Confessions* intimately would have hit upon, their gaze is directed upwards to some far-off point in the infinite heavens, which the Dutch master's wonderful picture makes us aware of, in two lines of vision, just not parallel, because the lines meet in infinity, away, out of the picture, where God is, and where the true life and love of saints meets and moves and holds communion, even while they are in the body.[1]

(3) *Forgiveness.*—And if that be the true nature of repentance, we see the true meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins is not an arbitrary remission of a purely external penalty, to be submissively accepted merely on the authority of a supernatural revelation. God *must* forgive the past if it be indeed true that, though the past acts and many of their consequences remain, the character has been changed, the man has been made better. The true prayer for forgiveness is identical with the prayer to be made better. It is because Christ is the greatest power in the world to make men better that we pray to be forgiven through Christ, 'for Christ's sake.' So long as the punishment will make a man better, there may be forgiveness even while the punishment lasts; but when the man wholly hates the sin and has wholly changed his character, then there can be no further need for punishment, if indeed it be true that God is what Christ made men feel Him to be. The forgiveness of sins is simply an element, a corollary of the fundamental Christian truth that God is love.

[1] A. N. St J. Mildmay, *Laureates of the Cross*, 20.

The Spirit in Man

Ps. li. 11.—'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

Is it David or some other Israelitish poet that utters this cry—'Take not thy holy spirit from me'? If David, there is a special meaning in these words. Then it is the king who speaks, the Lord's Anointed, the man upon whose young head there had been poured the oil which set him apart to his high office, and which was the symbol, in its gentle flow and sweet fragrance, of the gift and inspiration of a Divine influence. Could that gift be forfeited, taken back, lost? It is at any rate the cry of one who knows, as he never knew before, the weakness of his own nature, the strength of temptation, the need of Divine help, and to whom nothing therefore seems so dreadful as that God should withdraw His Spirit. So, rising in his penitence and prayer, he wrestles with God and stays the heavenly Visitant when his sin has made it seem as if He would depart. 'I will not let thee go.' There can be nothing so dreadful as His departing, nothing so desirable as His abiding.

¶ 'The doctrine of Divine assistance,' says John Foster in a letter to his parents, 'the gracious agency of the Holy Spirit, is infinitely consolatory to me—a doctrine without which I should sink into despondency and despair.'

Of course we are not to think that the Psalmist had knowledge of the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit. But the teaching even of the Old Testament is that it is the breathing of the Spirit of God into the human form that makes the man. Now this teaching of the Bible requires us to believe that the Holy Spirit of God is in every human being by virtue of his humanity—a teaching which it is difficult to realize. The prayer of the Church is usually, '*Give* us the Holy Spirit'; while the prayer of the Psalm, coming from a blood-guilty man, seems almost incredible even to Christian people—'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

1. The Spirit in the Old Testament is always coming upon men for all kinds of work—kings

to rule, prophets to preach, singers to sing, warriors to fight, judges to judge, builders and artists to fashion their beautiful fabrics, as well as priests to pray and sacrifice. The whole of life is governed and guided to successful issues by the coming of the Divine Spirit. And especially is this true of the spiritual life. All greatness of mind and heart, all purity of spirit, all strength and tenderness, all faith and charity, all courage and hope—Whence is all this? we say. There is but one answer, but one explanation of all this glorious goodness. It is the eternal Spirit. There are impulses in life, inspirations, forces of which we say—'This is God; this is the Spirit of God.'

> And every virtue we possess,
> And every victory won,
> And every thought of holiness
> Are His alone.

All the religious vitality of man, all the endowments which we call 'spiritual,' are said to be due to the Spirit of God. The Psalmist's prayer, 'Take not thy holy spirit from me,' is, as Dr A. B. Davidson has said, 'almost equal to a prayer that his mind may not cease to be religious, to have thoughts of God and aspirations towards God.' The very thought of God would go from us if we should lose this Spirit. The Psalmist, by his prayer, seems to imply that he felt himself on the brink of that abyss. His sin seemed to carry in it the possibility of this. 'My sin is ever before me,' he says; haunting my life; there is no escape from it. And yet in the memory of that remorse, in the thought of that stinging, biting conscience, he knows there is something worse—insensitiveness to sin, the power of going on sinning without feeling; the power of doing wrong and being blind to the meaning of wrong. 'Take not thy holy spirit from me.' Let me be haunted by the memory of my sin, but take not Thy Holy Spirit from me, for the greatest evil is to die!

2. Have we ever been where the Psalmist was at that alarming moment? Is there such a state as God-forsaken? If so, how we should fear it. The Holy Spirit stings, pains, convicts, but better the pangs of conscience than the careless life of sin. If it were not for this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us we should be what Whitman admired in the lower animals, congratulating them that they 'do not wake of nights and groan over their sins.' In a word, the 'wages of sin is death'—mortification; but 'the gift of God is eternal life.' All life comes through pain, even eternal life. The fate to be avoided has been expressed in graphic words by Robert Browning:

> Left in God's contempt apart,
> With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
> Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.

The ox ready to be killed! 'The ghastly smooth life, dead at heart!' That is the most awful calamity that can befall a man.

And we may see the other side by Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven,' which describes the soul chased by conscience, by a man whose life was marked by dissipation, anguish, poverty, and despair, but wherever he wandered, whatever his misfortunes, however great his sins, he could not get away from God and the pursuing voice of conscience. He strives to seek peace and rest from this hound that was following him in every imaginable place, in pleasure and in sorrow, but all the time

> Still with unhurrying chase,
> And unperturbèd pace,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
> Came on the following Feet,
> And a Voice above their beat—
> 'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'

'Conscience like a hound!' seems an awful figure, but better far to be chased by the voice of conscience everywhere; better far the majestic instancy of those following feet, than to fall into the 'ghastly smooth life, dead at heart.' Better remorse, better penitence, better purgatory, than to lose the Holy Spirit of God and be insensitive to the voice of spiritual things. God in the conscience may be like the hound of heaven. We thrust ourselves into pleasure and business. The one thing we dare not face very often is our own souls. And yet, let a man be awakened, as the Psalmist was, to see the horror of sin, and he will gladly take the remorse that sin gives, rather than that God should take His Holy Spirit from him. For consider the alternative. 'The wages of sin

is death.' Every time sin defeats us it becomes more easy to sin. We lose the shock and disgust that we had of evil doing. We laugh where we used to shudder; we do not care where once we shed bitter tears; we at last sink into acquiescence with evil where we battled against it with all our strength. Nothing can awaken us from slumber; conscience no longer stings; we degenerate into 'the ghastly smooth life.' The finer senses of the nature become blurred; the bloom is taken off the flower, we die gradually but surely.

They pass me by like shadows, crowds on crowds,
Dim ghosts of men, that hover to and fro,
Hugging their bodies round them like thin shrouds
Wherein their souls were buried long ago;
They trampled on their youth, and faith, and love,
They cast their hope of human-kind away,
With Heaven's clear messages they madly strove,
And conquered,—and their spirits turned to clay:
Lo! how they wander round the world, their grave,
Whose ever-gaping maw by such is fed,
Gibbering at living men, and idly rave,
"We only, truly live, but ye are dead."
Alas! poor fools, the anointed eye may trace
A dead soul's epitaph in every face![1]

3. Later on in this Psalm we have another wonderful note in the familiar words: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.' The end of the haunting sin is not despair; it is the Cross and salvation. It is perfectly true we can never make reparation for the sins we have committed, but Jesus Christ has made reparation. His redemptive work is of such a character that when the human heart puts its faith in Him, a full and simple faith, sin is overcome in the heart that believes; and when sin is overcome, the immediate result is this, that the Spirit of God, that has been within this human heart, hemmed in, cribbed, cabined and confined, repressed, abused, and so far as possible expelled, comes back again in an irresistible tide. Never was the Spirit driven out or there could have been no return; the Spirit was still there, but the sin had checked and defied the Spirit; and as Christ removes the sin the Spirit rises like a fountain within and, if the sin is completely removed, the man is filled with the Spirit. God is allowed to rule in the heart, and the character assumes the likeness of the perfect One who has come—Jesus Christ. Power flows out because of the character that has come in. We yield to God a loving homage. We become in God's hands instruments of His saving purpose. We are restored to Him. The Spirit is now in us and has made us indeed the children of God.

[1] Lowell, *The Street.*

The Supreme Loss

Ps. li. 11.—'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

THERE is a peculiarity about this verse which, though obvious enough, may perhaps escape notice. It contains two petitions, and these, unlike all the other petitions in the Psalm, are negative in form. What is passionately urged is not that something should be done, but that something should not be done. Deliverance from a possible tragic separation from God is earnestly sought for. That alarming experience is represented under two aspects. On the one hand, the Psalmist recoils from the idea of his being excluded from the Divine Presence, expelled from the secret place of the Most High. 'Cast me not away from thy presence.' On the other hand, he dreads the possibility of God's leaving him, withdrawing Himself from the fellowship which has hitherto subsisted between them. 'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

The petitions are ultimately one, inasmuch as they both contemplate with despair the breaking up of a highly prized communion. But the standpoints from which they describe the coming to pass of that mournful event are different. With regard to the first form which the prayer takes, Sir Richard Baker says, 'God indeed hath a presence of being, and this is everywhere. And He hath a presence of power, and this is everywhere. But He hath a presence of grace and favour, and this is not everywhere. This is the presence which I so much long to keep, which I so much fear to lose.'

Let us concentrate our attention, however, on the second form. The language employed is quite adequate to express the deepened meaning which New Testament teaching imparts to it.

1. *The Magnitude of the Loss.*—'Take not thy holy spirit from me.' Let us think of some of the deprivations to which human beings are exposed in this world.

(1) Here is a man, for instance, who, after years of patient waiting and economizing, has ventured to risk all his savings in a business of his own. He has taken the best available advice, and been slow to commit himself. The enterprise on which he has finally decided to embark is, in every respect, an honourable one. There ought, he reckons, to be an opening for his energies, and a sphere for his talents. The element of chance is not ignored by him, but the calculations he has made encourage him to proceed. And so at last, with not a little anxiety, he takes the final step. But disappointment after disappointment proves to be in store for him. Try as he may, he cannot stem the tide which sets against him. There is no disguising from himself the fact that his little capital, made up of hard-won earnings, is gradually being taken away from him. Those of us who have seen the thing happen know what it means to a home.

¶ I have never known any grief that ended life very quickly except this single grief of sudden and unexpected pecuniary ruin. Failures like those of the City of Glasgow Bank and the Liberator Society led in many cases to death or madness. Even when there was fortitude enough to go on with life, the life was often permanently shadowed and embittered. It is so very hard to go on for years and years accumulating by strict frugality a provision for one's self and one's own family circle, and see it all swept away in a moment by the deceit of the men we have trusted.[1]

(2) Take another case. Here is a man who has been leading an active life since his boyhood. His work has been full of interest to him, and success has attended his labours. With a zest that has commanded the admiration of his fellows, he has thrown himself habitually into whatever he happened to be doing. Conceive the feelings of such a person when, in the zenith of his powers, he is confronted with the intimation that his eyesight is rapidly going. How blank must the future appear to him in view of the prospect of a calamity of that kind. For one so alert as he, with a brain eagerly formulating schemes for obtaining a larger return of wealth and happiness than he has ever before secured, to be arrested suddenly in his career by the fact that he will soon be blind, must be an appalling experience.

(3) Or think of the state of mind of people when they are told that they have not long to live. In most circumstances it is a painful announcement to be entrusted with. News of this kind has to be 'broken,' as we say—given in fragments and not as a whole. Only the few whose sufferings are very terrible, or whose infirmities are very burdensome, or whose faith is very bright, express a keen desire to be gone. The many, unreconciled or reconciled but partially to the great change that awaits them, cling to life and cry to be spared.

> The tree of deepest root is found
> Least willing still to quit the ground;
> 'Twas therefore said, by ancient sages,
> That love of life increased with years
> So much, that in our latter stages,
> When pains grow sharp and sickness rages,
> The greatest love of life appears.

People are exposed to many sore deprivations, but, grievous as they are, they are not for a moment to be compared to that which is contemplated in the prayer of the Psalmist: 'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

2. *What is entailed in this Supreme Loss?*—Let us try to indicate certain disastrous results in experience of the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence.

To begin with, there is the inability to appreciate goodness and purity, and to respond sympathetically to everything that is tender and unselfish and innocent. He is not to be envied who has forfeited the capacity of being touched to the finer issues of his nature. To be unmoved by deeds of self-sacrifice and unsusceptible to the glory that is radiated by the patience of many around us, to have no tears of sorrow for sufferers or of joy for those who are fighting manfully against the temptations which daily beset them—that is a condition from which we may well pray to be saved.

Again, when a man ceases to hate sin there can be no indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When

[1] J. Brierley.

no revulsions of feeling occur against the idea of our choosing the baser alternative, when we have accustomed ourselves to the fact of evil in our own life and in the world, and are past the stage of shuddering at it and vehemently opposing it—then we are strangers to the company of that sacred Guest whose presence inspires the heart with holy detestation of sin. A man may succeed, as the world counts success, although he is thus deserted. But all the while that he continues to excite the astonishment and envy of multitudes he is dead—dead to the great distinctions and to the cause of God, in vindication of which the Son of Man laid down His life.

¶ Dante saw some souls in hell whose bodies were still alive on earth,—their friends in Florence and Lucca had not the faintest idea that these men, seemingly a part of everyday life, were, all the time, 'dead souls.' There is hardly a more terrible idea in all that terrible book, and yet it is a possibility in our own daily life—this atrophy of the spiritual nature, corresponding to the atrophy of the poetical nature which Darwin noted in himself as due to his own neglect.[1]

Once more, there is an utterly secular state of mind and heart into which men and women can only too easily settle down. It may be induced in various ways—by ambition, by yielding to care, by the neglect of religious exercises and habits of devotion. The higher affinities, in which our nature seeks to express itself, are crushed. No value is attached to that conscious relationship to God which it is man's privilege to take advantage of. Only that which appeals to the senses, which can be seen and touched, only what ultimately is material, is regarded as important. And so a human life, charged with infinite promise, becomes impoverished in its desires, stunted in its attainments, shrunken in its aims and outlook.

3. *The Spirit in which the Psalmist's Prayer should be uttered.*—On the one hand, it is to be *offered up in fear.* That against the happening of which the petition makes entreaty is a real possibility. We know it to be so. Therefore we ought to be alarmed, lest in our case it become an actuality. Not because God is an arbitrary Being, who does according to the counsel of His Own Will, ought we to cherish this feeling; but because sin grieves Him. His withdrawal of Himself is never a capricious action. He cannot deal with evil.

On the other hand, the prayer is to be *offered up in humble assurance.* We know of no other province except the soul of man in which the Holy Spirit exercises His secret functions. There may be other regions, there may be other intelligent natures differently constituted from ourselves, in which He carries on His hidden and noiseless work. But all that is revealed to us is that the gracious office which He fulfils is that of regenerating mankind, of applying and giving effect in humanity to the redemptive purpose of God declared in the life and obedience, the Passion and death, of Jesus Christ. Is it likely, then, that He will forsake a human life willingly, abandon His saving ministry in the case of even one individual? Not unless His overtures and entreaties are steadily rejected, not unless through obdurate indifference and sullen impenitence the ear is stopped to His voice and the door of the heart is closed against His entrance. He is God, and not a man that He should be turned aside from His purpose. The interest in us that binds Him to His gracious work is the interest of everlasting Love.

Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee.

The Goodness of God

Ps. lii. 1.—'The goodness of God endureth continually.'

In this Psalm we have two vivid pictures of character, one which is ruled from within by the love of self, and the other, which is the Psalmist's own experience, inspired from without by faith—faith in the mercy of the living God.

The Psalm begins with the indictment of this false, prosperous, 'mighty man' at whose hands the Psalmist had suffered. The character who is challenged is easily made out. He is described in touches so sharp and clear that we can almost fancy we see his cunning face, and hear the boastful words roll from his foolish lips. He is well-to-do, with such an abundance of wealth to trust in that the wisdom or neces-

[1] L. H. M. Soulsby.

sity of trusting in God never occurs to him. Riches are no sin in themselves, but, like all forms of strength, a great and dangerous temptation. As Augustine says, 'It was not his poverty but his piety which sent Lazarus in the parable to heaven, and when he got there, he found a rich man's bosom to rest in!' But this man trusts in his wealth—he is arrogantly sure of the future. He uses his influence in treacherous and despicable ways. His tongue is a tongue of deceit; he loves lies rather than truth, though that is but one manifestation, within the sphere of words, of a character that 'loves evil rather than good.'

But power and cunning usually go hand in hand with cruelty, and this 'great man' was no exception. Especially did his cruelty reveal itself through that subtlest medium of all, the medium of speech. His words were voracious words, that 'devoured' his neighbours—their peace, their property, their reputation, perhaps their life. His tongue was like a razor whetted to the finest edge, so that it should cut deep. No wonder that, with his wealth, influence, and disregard of God, he, uttering boastful words, vexed righteous souls.

The Psalmist reconciles himself in two ways to the existence of the powerful and unscrupulous braggart who vexed him: first, by contemplating his irrevocable doom, and, secondly, by putting him into his proper perspective in the world.

1. From a Christian standpoint such an expression of satisfaction at the doom of the 'mighty man' may seem unworthy; but, according to the usage of the Old Testament, this is not the malicious laughter of a petty personal triumph, but joy at the vindication of the moral order. The 'great man' has had his turn, now it is the turn of the righteous; and they will say: 'Look! there is the man that trusted in his money, and not in his God.' The money in which he trusted will do nothing for him when God comes to uproot him out of the land of the living; and the heart of the righteous is eased, and their faith confirmed, as they see such an one swept suddenly away from the place where he wrought so much harm. Christian sentiment may be shocked by such a confession of faith; but it must not be forgotten that there is nothing ignoble in the standpoint of the Old Testament. It is but the vehement expression of a passionate belief in the moral order, and a desire to see its consummation hastened. The Psalmist is himself so astonished at the goodness of Jehovah, of which the world is so full, so overawed by the thought of His loving presence, that he feels there can be no ultimate place in the world for men who ignore that presence and defy that goodness. If only we ourselves had the quick conscience and the wisdom to carry over the ideas of the Hebrew poet to our own day—in which the selfishness of the human heart is the same as it ever was, though it uses milder and more subtle means—then we should feel the touch of a power, not merely of dramatic interest but of moral conviction, where we have been too much accustomed to think that we were hearing only ancient rant. Psalms which we often pass over because of their violence, so treated, might become the very word of God to our own times and hearts.

2. The moral order has its positive as well as its negative vindication. Even while his righteous indignation is gathering weight the Psalmist stops and says quietly, 'the goodness, the love of God, is all the day long.' The boasting of the big man, his calumnies and his cruelties, may be vexatious enough; but they have little power to destroy the peace of the man who remembers that 'the mercy of God is all the day.' Those may be great facts, but this is an infinitely greater fact; and the art of happiness consists in seeing life in its true perspective. The love of God as expressed in the freshness of the morning, in the blessed repose of the night, in the mysterious succession of the seasons, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, in the stimulus of work, in the joys of friendship and love, in the hopes and the consolations of religion—that love is all the day; it is, when we consider it well, the one everlasting and overwhelming fact of experience.[1]

'As for me I am in God's house like a green olive tree.' He has no fear of being torn up by the roots: like an olive tree he flourishes. The open-air figure suggests a tree growing in the high temple precincts, as trees to this day grow upon the Haram around the great mosque in Jerusalem, open to the sunshine and washed by the great rush of wind from the west. The

[1] J. E. M'Fadyen, *Ten Studies in the Psalms*, 68.

Old Testament as much as the New haunts the open air for its figures of religion—a tree in full foliage, a tree planted by a river, a river brimming to its banks, the waves of a summer sea. Now this is not only because there is nothing else that will reflect the freedom of God's grace and the lavish joy it brings upon the world, but still more because the Bible feels the eternal truth, that to win this joy and freedom a man has got to go outside himself, outside his selfishness and other close tempers, outside his feelings and thoughts about himself, and receive the truths of religion as objective to him, taking the knowledge of God's pardon and peace as freely as he takes the sunshine of heaven. To those old founders of our faith religion was never man's feelings about religion; it was the love of God. God was not man's thoughts about God, but God Himself in His wonderful grace and truth, objective to our hearts. Therefore those ancient saints moved to the Spirit as the tree rustles to the wind, and, as in summer she is green and glad in the sunshine that bathes her, so they rejoiced in the Lord and in His goodness.

¶ 'One winter night I sat up late in my study, poring over the newest elaborate *apologia* for belief, until I fell asleep by the fire. Before daybreak a ploughman woke me on his way to work; as he tramped along the frosty road under my window he was singing, and I heard the words:

My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
And comfort of my nights,
In darkest shades if Thou appear
My dawning is begun!
Thou art my soul's sweet morning star,
And Thou my rising sun!

Somehow that hymn penetrated my heart with an unearthly thrill of conviction which none of the evidence-books could achieve. The philosophers might argue in favour of Theism; the ploughman was rejoicing in his experience of the love of God.' [1]

Was he not a wise man, this ancient singer of Israel, to call up that Divine perspective that he might bear his burden with patience and a quiet mind? It may be using a word too seriously to say that we have 'enemies.' But there are such things as worries with our fellow-men! Somebody says or does something that hurts; we have been overreached in some business competition, or disappointed in getting a post, or foiled along some path of public service. We come home with a natural vexation in our heart: sore at being beaten and anxious about our legitimate interests. It is all right enough. But sit down at the fire for a little and brood over it. Shut God out as care and anger can. Think only of your wrong, and it is wonderful how soon you will find spite rising, and envy and the cruellest hate. It is wonderful how quickly plans of revenge will form themselves in your usually slow mind, and how happy they will make you. Malice is like brandy to a man's brain, and will send him back with a beaming face to the work he left with scowls.[1]

What are we going to do about it? The Psalmist would say, Remember, deliberately call to your memory all the other things which meantime your trouble is apt to obscure. We have many friends from whom we have received much kindness. As we think of one and another who has been a true help to us at rough places on our journey, it begins to dawn upon us, perhaps, that we have been dealt with rather generously. What, after all, has the unfriendly act or speech taken from us? We have our work, and our home, and our books. Music charms us as much as ever, and our favourite author speaks to us as intimately as of yore.

And these are merely the minor mercies of God; we have not touched the big ones yet. For our trouble has not robbed the Bible of its power to bring us the comfort of God. The trouble has not stolen Christ, our Lord and Master, even if the thing we fear happens to us, even if, in the eyes of men, we are reckoned among those who have failed, there is something that remains—the fellowship and following of Jesus Christ.

¶ The difference between hugging a grievance and setting it at arm's length against all the other tender mercies of God, is just like the difference the wise physician makes when he comes into the stuffy room where the invalid sits beside the fire, nursing some not-too-serious ailment. He flings the window open and lets

[1] W. Canton, *Yesterday, To-day and For Ever*, 26.

[1] G. A. Smith, *Four Psalms*, 87.

in the air. He says, 'You must get out, man, into the open, and see the wide sweep of Heaven, and see your trouble that looks so big, against the breadth and bigness of Nature.' [1]

The Folly of Denial

Ps. liii. 1.—'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.'

1. The Jews of old time, for whom the Psalmist was a spokesman, were not given to treating God as a question. Their whole destiny as a people turned upon their relation to Him. It was to follow Him that they made their exodus from Egypt and welcomed the wilderness. It was upon their covenanted share in His purposes that all their national policy turned. History for them was the recollection of the great occasions when He had intervened on their behalf, their hope for the future was in His saving arm. As well deny to a modern Briton the influence of the sea in the development and well-being of his nation as deny to a Jew the reality of the influence of Jehovah. To one as well as to the other these were closed questions. The Bible does not discuss God as a proposition, but rather assumes Him as an axiom. The accents of doubt are heard within its pages, but it is seldom doubt of His existence, but only at times of His righteousness or love.

Therefore we can understand why the Psalmist, contemplating for a moment the astonishing phenomenon of a man who should daringly declare, 'There is no God,' should unceremoniously stigmatize him as a fool, and sweep him aside with anger and contempt. Yet even so it is doubtful whether the man he has in his mind is the intellectual doubter and not rather the moral defaulter. The Hebrew is a much less copious language than our own, and in translating we find gaps in the syntax which we are compelled to fill. In the Authorized Version such gaps are indicated by printing the interpolated words in italics. There are two such words in this passage, and if they be left out the sentence reads, 'The fool hath said in his heart, No God.'

That suggests a very different state of mind. It is that of the man who does not want God. He is hindered not so much by intellectual difficulty as by emotional repugnance. There have always been men to whom a moral governor of the universe would seem to be a calamity. Imagine a state of society which could be truly described as the Psalmist describes that which he has in mind: 'Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.' Men who could live in that state would be apt to say, 'No God, No God.'

These two attitudes of mind we ought in charity to try to keep distinct: the intellectual inquiry concerning God even when it sometimes declines to the point of denial, and the moral banishment of God which is sometimes shot through with guilty recognition of His presence. The one may be noble, the other is always ignoble. As a matter of experience they are not entirely distinct. It is perfectly true that looseness of morals will encourage philosophic doubt. It is also true that cleanness of life will encourage faith. It would not be fair to say that it is always so, but one need not fear the verdict of experience that it is often so. The man who has simply a repugnance concerning God, who cries with his heart rather than with his mind 'No God! No God!' ought not to leave it to others to brand him with the opprobrious title, but might well ask himself, 'Am I not a fool?'

¶ M. Viviani, when Prime Minister, in a speech which the Chamber ordered to be distributed all over France, said: 'We have torn the minds of men from religious faith. The wretched workman, who, weary with the weight of his day's work, once bent his knee, we now have raised up. We have told him that behind the clouds were chimeras. Together, and with a majestic gesture, we have put out in the heavens the lights that will never be lit again.' So men thought to eliminate God by proclamation, and set life free to develop as it would. The supernatural sanctions of conduct were freely attacked, not because of their irrationality, but because they still pricked human consciences and limited human lusts. The professed motive might be the assertion of human dignity or the like; the real motive was a selfish desire not for independence but for irresponsibility. In the name of humanity, that is, men claimed the right to be less than human—parts only of themselves.[1]

[1] A. Alexander, *By Sun and Candle-light*, 130.

[1] E. A. Burroughs, *The Valley of Decision*, 135.

2. But after all the supreme question in religion is not whether God exists; it is what we mean when we say 'God.' Perhaps there is no word in all the languages which it is more difficult to define than this greatest of all words, *God*.

'God,' says Dean Inge, 'is the beginning of religion and the end of philosophy, and the beginning and the end are one. Alike in philosophy and religion the important question is not whether God exists, but what we mean when we speak of God. We all, I suppose, tend to make God in our own likeness, or in the likeness of such an one as we should be if we could be what we would. Our dominant interests warp our conception of the Deity. The philosopher contemplates an eternal thinker; the moralist a magnified schoolmaster or judge; the priest reveres the head of the clerical profession; the scientist personifies the vital law of the phenomenal universe; the patriot invokes the champion of his nation. The average man, hemmed in by pitiless circumstance, appeals to a kindly governor of the world, who will forgive the mistakes to which nature is so relentless, and give compensation for all unmerited suffering. The many who have failed to bring their own lives under any ruling principle see no moral or rational principal in their environment. Their universe is godless as their own lives are anarchical. Such as men themselves are, such will God appear to them to be.' [1]

If that is true some kind of affirmation concerning God is inevitable for human nature, but that affirmation will also be largely conditioned by human nature. If humanity can only shape out a thought of the supreme Being which is a reflection of its character, then this vital question emerges: How came it to pass that in all lands which have been vitalized by the Bible and inspired by Jesus Christ the name of God has come to mean Righteousness, Justice, and Love? There would seem to be something there which is only imperfectly found in human nature itself. This is indeed the greatest thing which has happened in this old world of ours. Somehow it has come to pass that all the noblest things we know, our choicest aspirations, our deepest moralities, our idealized emotions, have centred at last in this single supreme word 'God.'

[1] *Outspoken Essays.*

This has not been the outcome of purely speculative thought; it is also a product of human character. It has come out of what men said and did as well as out of what they merely thought. The red blood of human life is in it. Men have striven for it, suffered for it, died for it. Behind it stand all the prophets; behind it stands the Christ; behind it stand all the Apostles, and the vast undistinguished multitude of men and women who have not only believed but have shaped their lives by their belief.

This is a realized fact in history before which we inevitably divide to the right hand and to the left. To say that we may have intellectual doubt is only to say a perfectly obvious thing. God is, always has been, and always must be the greatest and most intricate question in human experience. It is unthinkable that men by searching can entirely find Him out.

3. Part of the mystery of God is the double mystery of His unobtrusiveness and His all-pervasiveness.

(1) God is the most unobtrusive being who exists. No man hath seen Him at any time. He will not suffer even His shadow to fall athwart the beauty of Nature. The artist is hidden behind His art, His voice is never heard. We have heard the many voices of Nature, the thunder of the cataract, the roar of the mighty ocean, the sighing of the wind among the trees, we have even heard the falling of the leaf, but we have never heard the voice of God. There is nothing that happens anywhere that is not capable of a plausible explanation which may ignore God. His hand is never obviously stretched out to hinder men in the pursuit of their designs. He is so unobtrusive that men can, and do, absolutely forget Him. Surely this unobtrusiveness is the outcome of the delicacy of God. When we consider the heavens, the moon and the stars, and the far-flung universe, our thought of the power of its Author is apt to be overwhelming. If God were palpably visible, dominatingly present, which of us would dare to live his own life, think his own thoughts, speak his own words? But this exquisitely courteous God so hides Himself that the meanest among us may forget Him or even defy Him. That is one part of the mystery of God.

(2) The other part is His all-pervasiveness.

For God is never absolutely forgotten. At any moment the most reckless or defiant soul may find itself in His holy presence. Amid all the changes in history He abides, and humanity circles about His throne. Somehow along a clearly defined track in human affairs His name has come at last to be a focal point for everything that is just and holy in this world.

The man who, before that realized achievement of human thought and character, is conscious only of a feeling of repugnance and cries out 'No God, No God!' is surely judging himself. He who follows the rush-light of his own flickering intelligence, and dares to say, in the face of this great human affirmation, 'No God, No God,' does, to say the least of it, a bold and perilous thing. If, making that mental denial, he should also express it in words and thus influence others to make it, he ought to ask himself if he is not doing a very anti-social thing; while, if having thought it and said it, he also wishes it in his heart, he might well consider for his own sake if he has not suffered deterioration of character.

From how much evil has this very thought of God restrained men! Would any form of government be powerful enough, any police system potent enough, to restrain humanity from evil were it not for this seldom confessed but deeply felt belief in the existence of God? And it is not only a restraint, it is also an inspiration. Who has not realized in moments of noblest exaltation, unselfish altruism, or inspiring idealism, how unconsciously we pass into the atmosphere of religion, into the very presence of God?

4. Doubtless we are all ready to affirm, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty.' Yet by that affirmation we do not escape that fact in human nature which compels us to shape our thought of God in accordance with our own character. There is only one way to keep on believing that God is just, and that is to be just. There is only one way to feel poignantly that God is love, and that is to love. There is only one way effectively to believe in the Fatherhood of God, and that is to believe in the brotherhood of man. We Christians have often enough said—perhaps too often—that men deny God because their deeds are evil. We must remember also that we can affirm God only by deeds that are good. Who is the real denier of God? Is it the man who, as Dean Inge says, fails to bring his own life under any ruling principle and thus can see no moral or rational principle in his environment, or is it the man who, professing his faith in the goodness and justice and love of God, fails seriously to attempt to bring his own life into consonance with these attributes?

If there be a church which, asserting the justice of God, sanctions or even tolerates the flagrant injustice of man, does she not in fact make the great denial? If there be a church which, worshipping God's Christ as the Prince of Peace, not only fails to avert fratricidal struggle, but even tolerates it or defends it, does she not make the great denial? If, asserting the Fatherhood of God, which involves the brotherhood of man, she lends herself to the condonation of sects and cliques and castes, does she affirm or does she deny? Only, in the end, to the godly is God truly welcome.

The Right Attitude to Life

Ps. lv. 6.—'And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.'

More than half a century ago, when Lytton tried to imagine what 'The Coming Race' would be like, he clothed each member of it with mighty pinions, cunningly fashioned to soar through the spaces of the sky. To-day we can see that prophecy being actually fulfilled before our eyes. But the longing of the ancient Psalmist as he watched the birds on their flight towards the desert was an aspiration of the spirit which he never expected to come true in any literal way. He is telling us of a thought that shadowed his soul for an hour. Let us look into this mood of his. It is not his in any unique or even peculiar sense. The writer of this poem has voiced one of the great common experiences of humanity. But let us be quite clear as to what that experience really is. Let us not be misled by the music and the seeming unworldliness of these words about winged flight from a world of trouble and strife. The Psalmist was looking not heavenward, but earthward, when this plea for wings broke from his heart. He was moved to speak as he did, not by the surpassing charm of a heavenly vision, but by the dark unrest of the earthly outlook. The emphatic note here is that of departure, not of destination. It is necessary to remind

ourselves that this is so, for these words have also become the classic of the home-sick soul. They have been used to voice the farthest and most truly Divine desires of the human heart, and so have gathered a meaning which was not theirs at the beginning.

1. The idea of fleeing away suggests itself as a possible solution of life; and whenever it comes to a man like this it is a source of weakness. It is not a desire to find the joys of heaven; it is a desire to escape the pains of earth. The soul is hemmed in by its enemies, crushed down by its burdens, beset on all sides by the frets of the earthly lot; and there comes a vague desire to be out of it all. It is not aspiration, it is evasion. It is not response to the ideal, it is recoil from the actual. It is not the spell of that which shall be that is upon the soul, but the irksomeness or the dreadfulness of that which is. This is a mood that awaits us all. No man faces life as it should be faced, but some can hardly be said to face it at all. Their face is ever turned towards a seductive vision of quietness. The solution of life for them is not in a fight, but in a retreat. Of course we know there is no going back, and no easy deliverance from the burden and the battle, but in the thick of any fight there is a great difference between the man who wants victory and the man who merely wants a cessation of hostilities. This mood is something against which we must fight relentlessly. Picturing to ourselves the luxury of laying life down will not help us to face the duty of taking life up. The secret of enervation is found, not in the poverty of our resources, but in the cowardliness and selfishness of our attitude towards life. The battle is half won when we have looked the enemy in the face. The burden is the better borne as we stoop under the full weight of it.

The desire to fly away is a short-sighted and a selfish one. Supposing we had wings, what would we do? Fly away from the moil of the world and find rest and shelter for ourselves? Is that the best and noblest thing to desire to do? After all, we know other and loftier moods than this. We know that staying is better than going when there is so much to stay for. We know that working is better than resting, we who live in a world where the strength of our hands and the warmth of our hearts count for something.

¶ Pythagoras was once asked contemptuously by a Greek tyrant who he was and what was his particular business in the world. The philosopher replied that at the Olympic games some people came to try for the prizes, some to dispose of their merchandise, some to enjoy themselves and meet their friends, and some to look on. 'I,' said Pythagoras, 'am one of those who come to look on at life.' Bacon, in telling the story, adds: 'But men must know that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be lookers-on.' [1]

The life that counts must toil and fight,
Must hate the wrong and love the right,
Must stand for God by day and night—
This is the life that counts!

The life that counts must helpful be,
The griefs and needs of others see,
Must seek the slaves of sin to free—
This is the life that counts!

2. This disposition to seek rest from our burdens by flight is as prevalent to-day as in the days of the Psalmist. We still try to fly away from our difficulties instead of seeking the strength of God to sustain them.

(1) Here is a young man who would fain try Jonah's plan for evading life's stern and painful duties. The sails of an emigrant ship are the white wings which he covets. If he could pay his fare to the far west or the far south, then he would feel himself on the highway to satisfaction. Yet, if his wildest wish were granted, if he could get outside the restraints and obligations which hamper him here, the fact still remains that, though he shifts his sky, he does not change his character. The inner entity of a human being—his love, and hope, and shame, and conscience, and memory—this is something which goes where he goes, and stays where he stays, and follows him as he wanders, and abides with him where he enters in, and lives with him all day long, and walks ghostly through his dreams at night. Change of scene does not mean rest.

(2) Here, again, is a man whose business affairs are becoming involved. His resources are being more and more impoverished. He feels as though he is being gradually and

[1] J. Moffatt, *Reasons and Reasons*, 45.

relentlessly closed in as by an iron wall. His cares accumulate until they become a huge burden, which lies like a cold, heavy stone upon his heart. This goes on for months and perhaps for years. At length, when the burden is intolerable, he cries in the bitterness of his soul: 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest.' Now that is a moment fraught with infinite peril. For in these matters thought is so speedily followed by action. When a man begins to think of flying away from his burden, he will soon make an attempt to fly. And how is the attempt frequently made? A vast number of men try to get away from the burden of their worries and cares by an excessive indulgence in drink. The man uses drink as a kind of opiate. He takes that mind of his, which is 'heated hot with burning fears,' and he plunges it in forgetfulness by means of drink. He takes to drink as a means of flight from care. The man says: 'I will take to drink and be at rest.'

(3) To take another example. Here is a man whose burden is not the care of the world but the burden of an outraged conscience. He carries a load of guilt which weighs upon his heart like lead. His burden depresses him, and produces lowness and insipidity of life. And so, while some men carry a load of care, this man carries a load of remorse. At length the burden of guilt becomes intolerable, and the man cries out in his heart: 'Oh, for the wings of a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest.' Here again the man who thinks of flying away from the gnawings of his conscience will soon be trying to fly away. And how is the attempt frequently made? A vast number of people seek to get away from the burden of their conscience by an excessive indulgence in pleasure. A sense of guilt destroys the taste for the quieter pleasures of life, and so men seek refuge in sensational and distracting enjoyments. But it is useless to take the wings of pleasure to fly away from a violated conscience. There is only one way to rest, and that lies right through the heart of the world's work and pain. Rest is not for those who fly away from life's difficulties, but for those who face them. 'Take my yoke . . . and ye shall find rest.' It were not well for our own sakes that we had wings. It were not well for us to be able to avoid the burden-bearing and the tale of tired days, for God has hidden the secret of our rest in the heart of our toiling. They who come unto the City of God come there not by the easy flight of a dove, but by the long, slow pilgrimage of unselfishness.

O that I had a dove's swift silver wings,
I said, that I might straightway leave behind
This strife of tongues, this tramp of feet, and find
A world that knows no struggles and no stings;
Where all about the soul soft silence flings
Her filmy garment, and the vexèd mind
Grows quiet, as there floats upon the wind
The soothing slumber-song of dreamless things.
And lo! there answered me a voice, and said:
'Man, thou hast hands and heart. Take back thy prayer.
Covet life's weariness. Go forth and share
The common suffering and the toil for bread:
Look not on Rest, although her face be fair,
And her white hands shall smooth thy narrow bed.'[1]

3. Yet there is a beauty and a fitness in this longing. Alas! for the self-satisfied man who never feels the lack of wings. It is expressive of more than the weariness of a world-worn spirit, or the thinly disguised selfishness of one who fears to pay the price of life.

When the long working-day of life is wearing away its last hours and verging towards the great stillness, the voices of time fall but faintly on the ear, the adorations and fashions and enthusiasms of the world come to mean little to a man who in his day has followed them as eagerly as any, and the heart within him asks only for rest.

God, if there be none beside Thee
Dwelling in the light,
Take me out of the world and hide me
Somewhere behind the night.

When, like Simeon the seer with the Christ-Child in his arms, a man feels that for him life has said its last word and shown its last wonder and uttered its last benediction, the desire for rest is a pure and spiritually normal thing; it is just the soul's gaze turned upward where

beyond these toils
God waiteth us above,
To give to hand and heart the spoils
Of labour and of love.

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *Poems and Sonnets*, 69.

Against the Psalmist's passionate prayer a mystical writer has set this other Scripture: 'The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot: so she returned unto him into the ark. Then he put forth his hand and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.' And the two passages together make a parable of the soul's quest for peace, to teach us where and how real peace can be found.

In Quest of Tranquillity

Ps. lv. 6.—'And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.'

HUMAN nature is essentially restless. Many have been struck by the contrast in this respect between man and the lower animals. A child does not seem to enjoy existence quite as much as a frolicking lamb or puppy; and Walt Whitman spoke for at least some others when he looked with envy on the placid self-satisfied mood of a herd of cows. The probability is that tranquillity of mind is even less common than an observer might be disposed to think. There are a great many who obviously are unhappy; and when we add those who, though joyless at heart, are too proud to show it, or too well-bred not to keep up an apparent flow of spirits, we may be sure that there is a very widespread demand for the secret of peace.

¶ Thackeray says of the world we all live in, 'This is Vanity Fair, not a moral place, certainly, and not a merry one though very noisy. A man as he goes about the show will not be oppressed by his own or other people's hilarity. An episode of humour or of kindness touches or amuses him here and there, but the general impression is more melancholy than mirthful.'

As a fact, the conditions of human life are such that man may seem to be predestined to unrest. Our natural desires are many and exorbitant, and only a few of them can be gratified as we propose, or even gratified at all. We have a conscience which makes us uncomfortable, and even torments us if we defy it; and our lives are full of habits or actions which amount to a defiance of conscience. Our affections are fixed on possessions, or on kindred and friends, that are hostages for our happiness, and we hold them all by a more or less precarious tie. We are travelling into an unknown future, in which it is certain that we shall be smitten, bruised, and impoverished by the forces of change and decay, and that in it there awaits us the inevitable event which, it may be with merciful suddenness, it may be after a period of weakness and agony, will carry us away from the light of the sun and from most of the things which have made for our happiness.

The subject is not one which has been overlooked. The work of the world goes on because the world has a working theory as to the secret of peace. Every great religion that has gained a footing among men has prescribed some treatment of the malady. The urgency of the need was observed by Him who knew what is in man, and much of Christ's teaching circled round rest and peace. Let us glance briefly at some of the other famous specifics, and then consider the provisions which are made for dealing with the evil in the Christian gospel.

1. To begin with, the world has its working theory as to the secret of rest. It is that, if we are miserable, it is because we have not enough of this world's goods, or that we have too much of its evils. If he made his fortune, one thinks; another, if he were famous; another, if he had power, and so on, he would then be within sight of the sovereign good. Others, especially as life advances, think that if only they could escape from their labours, and exchange the heavy and monotonous drudgery for sheltered leisure, they would find the pearl of price. And the philosophical observer has smiled at these hopes as illusions, and written essays and satires on the subject. They are, he admits, useful illusions. The world's work would not be so efficiently done were it not that it promises more satisfaction than will ever be got out of its results. He also advises those who are looking to find peace later, and outside of their work, rather to look for it now and along with their work, and to make the most of the possible joys of the passing day. But on the main issue it seems established that rest of soul is not guaranteed by success in the pursuit of the blessings of this world.

¶ I suppose the most exalted and least 'carnal' of worldly joys consists in the adequate

recognition by the world of high achievement by ourselves. Yet it is notorious that—

It is by God decreed
Fame shall not satisfy the highest need.

It has been my lot to know not a few of the famous men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true. Like all other 'moral' satisfactions, this soon palls by custom, and as soon as one end of distinction is reached another is pined for. There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their own misery so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there. I take it, then, as unquestionably true that this whole negative side of the subject proves a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God.[1]

2. At the opposite extreme from the workaday theory is a prescription which, fanatical and absurd as it seems to us, has played a great part in religious history. The advice given is that man, instead of seeking peace in the acquisition of worldly goods, should seek it by renouncing and despising them. It is a doctrine which has had a strong attraction for the people of India. It was illustrated by the great renunciation of Buddha. He was born and grew up in a court, he was the heir to a throne, he married and was blessed with the love of wife and child; then one day, when he chanced to look on sickness and death, he became conscious of the wretchedness of human existence, turned his back upon the kingship and the sweet home life, joined himself to the saintly sages of the land, and learned their prescription for a victorious and tranquil life. The prescription which they gave was to make his home in a cave, to procure the barest necessaries of life by begging, to fast to the verge of starvation, and to afflict the body with additional tortures.

There has always been a grain of sense even in the wildest extravagances of enthusiasm, and there was a substratum of reason in the ascetic mode of life. It rested on the just observation that there is a keen satisfaction in self-denial which is not yielded by self-indulgence, in particular that the source of a great deal of the worst of human misery is due to the rebellion of the body, and that nothing is more needful than to make sure that what was intended for a slave has not gained the upper hand. But as experience proved that many who were most in earnest in this way of life were not even then at peace, and as, moreover, common sense effectively protested that there is ample scope for self-denial in labours which are useful to the world, without having recourse to self-inflicted torments which are of no benefit to society, the remedy fell into discredit in Europe with the Protestant Reformation.

It did not ease me of my load
That I had left the world behind,
I was not any nearer God
By being far from humankind.

¶ In a letter to a friend and fellow-worker, Dr Illingworth wrote: 'I think I know what you mean about Lent quite well. Surely all asceticism belongs to the negative side of religion (touch not, taste not), and must therefore assume less and less importance in proportion as the positive side (to know the love which passeth knowledge) develops—and all this was meant to be. To attempt, therefore, to invent fresh negatives when the old ones have ceased to be felt, just because they have passed into one's life and done their work, is to go backwards. More positives are what we want. I know you agree with all this, but can't get rid of a certain sensual craving to hurt yourself a little more, just for the niceness of it. But I should struggle against that.'[1]

3. Mention may be made next of the prescription of the Stoics. At the beginning of our era there were many men of great moral earnestness, Greeks and Romans, who claimed to possess in a signal degree the blessing of serenity of mind, especially under the strokes of adversity. How did they teach men to attain to it? We open the pages of Epictetus, and we find the ideas expounded in convenient compass. The things which happen in our life, he says, are of two kinds: those which are due to our own voluntary action, and those which are governed, in whole or in part, by forces that are beyond our control. The goods of life, similarly, are of two kinds: those which,

[1] G. J. Romanes, *Thoughts on Religion*, 151.

[1] *The Life and Work of J. R. Illingworth, D.D.*, 241.

because they are in our power, we can be sure of getting, and those which, being outside our control, we cannot be sure of getting or retaining. The general prescription is that we should limit our desires—confining them to those things which are within our power, and leaving out of account those things which depend upon others.

From this general attitude we may certainly learn some practical wisdom. We do well to remember the Parable of the Feast, and to behave as decently in the struggle for the good things of this world as we should behave at a dinner-party among our friends. It is also useful to distinguish between the things which are, and those which are not, in our own power, and to cultivate the spirit of uncomplaining submission to the inevitable and irreversible dispensations of Providence. But it is not easy to endure as the Stoic recommended without having access to richer sources of comfort than were supplied by his general view of the universe. He knew only of an unbending and pitiless fate, and such a conception moves us more readily to rebellion than to reverent submission. The human heart in its anguish asks, not for moralizings, but for promises of God.

4. It was, then, a much-discussed as well as an ancient and widespread malady which Christ promised to cure when He said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' In His proposed treatment there was a combination of remedies old and new. But even the old appear in a new setting, and with new elements of healing and consolation.

(1) There is a strain of the teaching of Jesus which does not contain much more than the advice of the Stoic sages to cut down the demands of the self. The great text in which Christ promises rest, when read along with its context, suggests that the reason why so many are restless is that they do not possess the meekness and lowliness which they could learn from His own example. Their mistake is that they think so much of self, make so much of self, and claim so much for self, that they are foredoomed to discontent, inasmuch as the world will certainly refuse them many things which they demand, and especially will find many occasions to thwart their ambitious desires and wound their self-esteem. If, therefore, they could get rid of this spirit by becoming Christlike, their unhappiness would be destroyed, at least in large part, by cutting it away at the root.

¶ 'Clearly Christianity exalts common affections and duties into love of God and of man (of a man's nearest and dearest more particularly, but ultimately of all people in proportion as he is concerned with them); clearly, too, this love is sustained, and is kept wholesome and humble, by some sense that it is a man's own poor response to God's love of him; also it evidently forbids concentration of one's interest on oneself, one's fortunes, or one's soul; and, above all, it is not a mere sentiment but a driving power.

Such are some of the evident characteristics of the Christian spirit at its best, and one gradually learns that every idea of what is right, honourable, splendid, or worth while, which one can lastingly entertain, is, in the very intelligible phrase of the Gospel, fulfilled by this Christian spirit; the sound and lasting element in any healthy aspiration or any ambition worthy of man or woman is seized upon by the spirit of Christ (as real Christians conceive it) and is strengthened. I say one gradually learns, because, of course, it is immensely hard to reconcile oneself in practice to that sacrifice of mere self-indulgence or mere greed or mere malignity, which Christianity inexorably demands in the case of some of our native desires and the creeds and ideals based on them. But we are all quite aware in cold blood that sacrifice is going one way or another to be enforced upon us.'[1]

(2) The old and the new also blend, though with a much larger element of the new, in the teaching of our Lord that the chief source of man's unrest is his general sinful condition, and that the secret of rest is deliverance from sin. The Christian account of man's condition is that he is deeply polluted and grievously enslaved by sin, and, further, that as a consequence the soul lives a turbulent and miserable life. This is incontestably true. Sin is not sustenance for the soul: it is like the husks with which the prodigal, in default of nourishing food, was fain to fill his belly. It is only in God, and in doing the will of God, that the soul finds true rest, and much of human striving is

[1] Lord Charnwood, *A Personal Conviction*, 13.

at bottom an attempt to find partial substitutes for God. This would appear to be the ultimate explanation of the craving for stimulants of various kinds, physical or mental; they at least give a temporary feeling that the soul has found more abundant life and tasted of heaven. It cannot, however, be said that it was a wholly new discovery that sin is the seat of the evil. It had been proclaimed or implied by prophets or psalmists. The way pointed out by Buddha, as has been said, was to find rest by 'ceasing from sin.' The really new element in the gospel of Christ is its announcement of the way of deliverance from sin.

¶ Browning has suggested that among those who heard the Lord Jesus invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Him was one of the two robbers who were eventually crucified at His side. The poem describes the emotions which passed through the man's soul, and he is made to say:

The words have power to haunt me. Long ago
I heard them from a Stranger—One who turned,
And looked upon me as I went, and seemed
To know my face, although I knew Him not.
The face was weary, yet He spoke
Of giving rest—He needed rest, I think—
Yet patiently He stood and spoke to those
Who gathered round Him, and He turned
And looked on me. He could not know
How sinful was my life, a robber's life,
Amid the caves and rocks. And yet He looked
As though He knew it all, and, knowing,
Longed to save me from it.

It may have been so, or it may not. Browning's fancy may have a basis in fact; we cannot tell. But this at least we know—that he who suffered by the side of Jesus is one of those who have proved the truth of His saying, and have found Him able to make good His word.[1]

(3) It is a great part of Christ's gift of peace that He enables us to believe in God as the Father in heaven. Buddha preached peace by deliverance from sin, and made some way in teaching men to eradicate their selfish desires, but the soul cannot have true peace if his word was the last word on our little life—'As ye have no Father in heaven to take care of you, see that ye love one another.' For those who do not find God in it the world has no doubt many glories, as it has many privileges and adventures, but it is also a thing of terror. The menacing and destroying forces of time have us at their mercy. We are condemned to the gradual forfeiture of most things that we value, and in the last resort we are seemingly doomed to extinction. It makes a difference which is almost immeasurable to our outlook on this universe if we believe in the God whom Christ revealed as the Father, the God who knows each of us, loves and pities us, and who possesses the infinite power and the infinite wisdom which ensure that He will make His loving purposes effective, and that all the hostile powers of earth and time are unable to do any real and deadly hurt either to His cause or to His children.

¶ Knowing as I do what the revelation of God means to me, knowing what God's Fatherhood and the presence of God's Spirit is to my own life, my whole heart goes out with infinite pity towards those whose lives are unblessed by what is to me the very pole-star of my existence. I cannot bear to think of some stumbling blindfold through the pitfalls of life while my hand is clasped by a never-failing Guide; or of others who look forward to the end of their earthly life with dread and trembling while I see only the outspread arms of the everlasting Father and the welcome of a life-long Friend.[1]

(4) Lastly, there is a deeper and more mystical side. Peace takes possession of the mind in two ways. Sometimes it enters in the wake of ideas, as the result of learning some new or important fact or adopting a fresh conviction. Sometimes also it penetrates the soul in a way of which we cannot easily give a rational explanation. It is a common experience that there are persons the mere contact with whom is restful; their spirit seems to mingle with our spirit and transmit to it some of its own repose. It is a distinctive Christian experience that a similar peace enters the soul in conscious union and communion with the risen and glorified Christ. He Himself spoke of it in words which implied that His peace was not so much the result of believing certain facts, and accepting certain doctrines, as the result of the contact of the receptive soul with His own greater personality and His own abounding life. There is an abiding in Him which is the condition of the benediction, 'My peace I give unto you.'

[1] H. T. Knight.

[1] *Quintin Hogg*, 310.

¶ The Sadhu's peace is not limited to these hours of ecstasy, which only come now and again: it pervades his whole life. All the time he feels Christ's living Presence, which brings with it 'that peace which the world cannot give.' Some of the Upanishads begin and end with a kind of solemn, rhythmical chant, consisting of the words *peace, peace, peace.* But all these sacred writings of his own homeland failed to give him the promised blessing; it was the Living Christ, revealing Himself to him in a wonderful way, who brought him this gift of grace. 'In Christ I have found that which neither Hinduism nor Buddhism could give me, peace and joy upon earth.' 'It is such a wonderful peace, I only wish I could show it to you. But this is impossible, for you cannot see it—you cannot describe it to others. Even in my mother tongue I can find no word to express this peace. But those whose spiritual eyes are open will be able to understand it.' [1]

The Trinity in Human Experience

Ps. lv. 16.—'As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me.'

1. The translation of this verse in our Bible obscures one or two interesting points. To bring out the meaning of the original more clearly we might render it in this way: 'As for me, I am calling upon Elohim, and Yahweh is answering me.' It will be noticed that the Psalmist brings together two names of God within a few words. Is there any significance in this change of name? It may be, of course, only an accident that brings the two names of God together, simply the result of the parallelism which is the common structure of Hebrew poetry, but there is good reason to believe that the second half of the verse adds, and is intended to add, a new idea.

The two common words for God in the Old Testament are *Elohim* and *Yahweh.* But they are very rarely found together. Writers who use one of the Divine names seldom employ the other; indeed this is one of the clues by which critics have disentangled the various strands which go to make up the so-called Books of Moses. But further than this, and more important, is the fact that the two names for God imply two different aspects or conceptions of the Divine Being. The name 'Elohim' is very likely connected with the oldest word for God, common to all Semitic languages, which is the word for describing the Almighty, the Divine Power, the Unapproachable, the transcendent Being who dwells above and behind all that is eternal. 'Yahweh' is the personal name for the God of Israel. It denotes God in His relation with His chosen people. It is Yahweh who makes His covenant with the people, and speaks to them through the prophets. It is Yahweh who loves the people, and saves them, and punishes them, and deals with them in the events of the nation's history. Yahweh is the personal God, the God of history, the God of the Covenant. *Power* and *personality* are the two ideas expressed in these two words, 'Elohim' and 'Yahweh.'

The old theologians were fond of dwelling on the connection between Yahweh and Jesus, and of finding in the theophanies of the Old Testament predictions of the Incarnation. There was a profound truth in this thought, for the line of universal reflection and experience which we find associated with the name of Jehovah was really completed in the belief that Jesus is the manifestation in human life of the Divine.

2. It is helpful to consider also the situation of the Psalmist. He is in deep distress. His hopes and aspirations have all failed. The cause with which he identified himself has been crushed. Godless oppressors rule the city, and disillusionment and despair oppress him. It is out of this despair that he lifts up his hands to the Eternal. Is there no purpose in the world? Is there no meaning in life? The Divine response and assurance come from the covenant God—out of the midst of human life and history, through the personalities of other human beings.

This is the typical religious situation. Frequently it is made a reproach to faith that men find God because they cannot get satisfaction out of life. The gibe is not well founded, but the assertion is true all the same. We turn to the unseen world when this world gets beyond our control. The passage from religion of the derivative kind to that of first-hand originality is always through disillusionment. The perception of the hollowness of the aims and ambitions which have formerly filled the life

[1] F. Heiler, *The Gospel of Sâdhu Sundar Singh,* 112.

seems to be a necessary moment in the religious consciousness. There are countless illustrations of this. Buddha is one. Augustine is another. Man always calls to God 'out of the deep.' Whatever be its explanation, the *fact* of evil is the starting-point of religion.

Our Psalmist called to Elohim. This, again, is true to experience. What men want is to reach the ultimate ground of existence. Nothing but reality can finally satisfy the religious impulse. The thirst out of which it arises cannot be slaked except by that which is final.

Then comes the third 'moment' in religious experience, the response of the Divine to the cry of the human soul. It is Yahweh who sends it. It comes through human life and history, mediated through human personalities. The religious type of revelation is through inspired men. The answer comes, but not in the form that he expects. God answers not by thunder, nor by the revelation of certain clear schemes of theological doctrine. The answer comes in a perfect life of love in a person who shows God, not in a philosopher who explains Him. 'I called unto Elohim, and Jesus answered.'

3. The doctrine of the Trinity is often represented as deeply mysterious and a matter of interest only to experts in theology. It is indeed beyond the intellect of man, and its refinements have little to do with practical Christian life. And yet the doctrine rests upon a deep foundation in the actual religious experience of all men. 'I called unto Elohim . . . Yahweh answered.' That, as we have said, seems to be the essential religious situation. 'I called,' but why did I call? and why do all men everywhere, after their manner, call? It is surely one of the most remarkable facts about man that he adopts inevitably this attitude of quest and prayer. Why is it that he alone is unquiet in the world and cannot satisfy himself that here is his final home? Why should he suppose that it is of any use to question and aspire? There is no answer to this problem except the answer that religion gives. Man aspires to the eternal because in fact he belongs there. There is a spirit in man that will not let him rest either in pleasure or in despair. Why call unto Elohim? Because the Spirit moves in us. Why call unto Elohim? Because it is the eternal, ultimate ground and reality of the universe that we cry to. Our deepest need is to know the reality of the world and to base our life on that. Nothing but the Father and Creator of all can satisfy our desire. But the answer comes through human life and in human persons. It is God in man that answers. The Son reveals and saves. Thus we may see the Trinity in action; not a dogma enshrined in a creed, but a fact of human life.

4. Has the doctrine of the Triune God no practical message for us? 'I am calling unto Elohim.' That, at least, is true of everybody. There is no human spirit that does not feel the need of the Eternal. The petitionary attitude is native to man. But we do not always understand our needs. We think that we can assuage our unrest with work or pleasure and fill our lives with the interests of earth. But it is not true. There is no substitute for the bread of heaven. The first step that we must take is to see our need as it really is; and the second is to know where to find God. To the abstract intellect the universe remains sphinx-like: there is no voice, neither any that answereth. We must find God in history, in human life. We see God in the face of Jesus Christ.

¶ Lord Charnwood, dealing with the Gospel of St John, tells us that his studies have brought him 'into a presence which to the normal mind is dear and awful and strangely near'; and through that presence he has come to know God: 'it has ceased to be a matter of doubt with me that there is a living God, and, simultaneously with the passing of that doubt, I have come to believe that the nature of that living God was revealed to man in Jesus Christ.' 'It grows upon many open minds as simple and certain fact that men have had so far but one Master, and that He revealed the one gospel that they can ever have.'

Has not this some message for us? We who have called unto Elohim and find that Yahweh saves are summoned to a great mission. God speaks to man through men. He needs us to be His messengers to those who are calling to Him. To argue well is good, and it is, indeed, necessary to commend the gospel to the reason of the age; but it is not so that the Kingdom of God chiefly grows and the salvation of God is spread abroad. God needs persons who will

show Him in action, far more than thinkers who can explain His nature.

¶ Sir Edward Burne-Jones once wrote: 'That was an awful word of Ruskin's, that artists paint God for the world. There's a lump of greasy pigment at the end of Michael Angelo's hog-bristle brush, and by the time it has been laid on the stucco, there is something there that all men with eyes recognize as Divine. Think what it means: it is the power of bringing God into the world—making God manifest!'

Persistent Prayer

Ps. lv. 17.—'Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray.'

The writer of the Psalm is not prescribing hours of prayer when he says this. In like manner, the writer of the 119th Psalm is not prescribing set times of praise when he says, 'Seven times a day do I praise thee.' But although they are not laying down a rule, they are affording an example. Prayer, as praise, is to be a habitual daily practice. It is to be practised when we lie down and when we rise up. And if we add to our morning prayer, prayer at noon, when we are 'bearing the burden and heat of the day,' we shall be adding another important aid to the life of personal religion.

¶ Dr Maclaren, that prince of expositors, realized the necessity of the shut door. Every morning from nine till ten he had a quiet hour with God. In the solitude of silence, his Bible on his knees, he claimed the Divine gift of power. Dr Alexander Whyte also emphasized this great truth; he, on the other hand, found the last hours of night most blessed to his soul. He said, 'For myself, I always feel that Divine things thrive best with me, aye, and all things else, when I let nothing invade me and my Bible between ten and eleven at night. And you also are, as a rule, free from all your day's work, and from all your entertainments, and from all your visitors by that hour. And it is about that hour that your Bible always says to you—unless you have completely silenced its voice by your long neglect of it—"What!" it says to you, "can you not watch with me one hour?" For it knows, and He who puts it into your hand knows, that that hour, so spent, would be the best hour for you of all your twenty-four.'[1]

[1] T. W. Riddle, *The Pathway of Victory*, 119.

1. *In the Evening.*—Evening prayer comes naturally first. When the fever of the exciting day is cooled, and the twilight is darkening into gloom, when the experiences of the day are quietly reviewed, and conscience, whose still small voice is so often drowned by the world's noise, awakes and claims a hearing, the sins and failures and mistakes of the day sometimes rise up alarmingly before the eye: and we cannot go to rest till we have unburdened our hearts in penitence at the feet of God. At evening we need to pray for pardon and for peace.

¶ It was his habit to close every day by reporting to his Friend. Of this habit he said: 'The disciples returned at evening and made a report to Christ of their work. Thus I tell Him of my life during the day, my dealings with persons who have come into it, and whatever has been attempted—in short, the whole day's work: its efforts, failures, mistakes, sins and joys. That is my evening prayer.'[1]

2. *In the Morning.*—In the morning we should look forward to the duties of the day, anticipating those situations in which temptation may lurk, and preparing ourselves to embrace such opportunities of usefulness as may be presented to us. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.

But it is sad to think how often we make the urgency of business, or our own weariness of body and mind, an excuse for curtailing within the narrowest space, or neglecting altogether, our morning intercourse with God. We can even persuade ourselves that to keep sacred a special time for private devotion savours of formalism, and thus we neglect a plain duty on the plea of avoiding a dangerous Pharisaism; or we tell ourselves that it is better to leave our praying till we have a more pressing sense of need. Sometimes we may let an inconvenient situation for prayer, the want of a place secret enough and far enough removed from disturbance, excuse us from it. Sometimes social or family prayer is thought to absolve us from the duty of private prayer. Sometimes it is postponed for want of what we call a right

[1] J. T. Faris, *The Life of Dr J. R. Miller*, 223.

spiritual tone, discomposure of mind through a world of cares preventing us from getting the stillness of soul required for communion with God. Sometimes, too, we are hindered from it by the sense of recent sin, the guilt of which, lying on our conscience, whispers to us that the prayer of such a heart as ours would be only a mockery of God.

The great obstacle, however, is the tendency to look upon prayer more as a cold duty than as a blessed privilege and joy, a direct and simple-hearted talk with a loving Father in heaven, able to help and waiting to help whenever a cry for help reaches His listening ear. If we only realized more fully the heart of our Father, to unburden our own heart to Him would be our greatest joy. As our love to Him grows, our love of prayer will grow along with it. As we continue musing the fire will burn, till we would not miss that fellowship for all the world.

¶ I ought to pray before seeing any one. Often when I sleep long, or meet others early, it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. It is unscriptural. Christ arose before day and went into a solitary place. David says: 'Early will I seek thee'; 'Thou shalt early hear my voice.' Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness, and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then when in secret prayer the soul is often out of tune. I feel it is far better to begin with God—to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another.[1]

When first thy eyes unveil, give thy soul leave
To do the like; our bodies but forerun
The spirit's duty. True hearts spread and heave
Unto their God, as flow'rs do to the sun.
Give Him thy first thoughts then; so shalt thou keep
Him company all day, and in Him sleep.

Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush
And whispers amongst them. There's not a spring
Or leaf but hath his morning-hymn. Each bush
And oak doth know I AM. Canst thou not sing?
O leave thy cares and follies! go this way;
And thou art sure to prosper all the day.[2]

[1] R. M. M'Cheyne. [2] Henry Vaughan.

3. *At Noon.*—Then, in the mid-time of the day, if one is able to create amid the whirl of traffic a silent space, how blessedly that leisure may be employed in contemplating the Divine Being and in pouring out one's heart before Him! The tangled skeins are unravelled then, heat and fret are taken out of the heart, the perplexed path is made plain, burdens and anxieties are rolled on Christ, rough ways become smooth and crooked places are made plain. In the mid-hour of the day God spreads a table before us, in the presence of our enemies.

Daniel could not be content with private devotions in the morning and in the evening. He kneeled in his chamber three times a day, having his windows open toward Jerusalem. This devotion was private. The windows were not open toward Babylon that he might be seen of men to pray, but toward Jerusalem, where his God dwelt. Are our windows open sufficiently often if we open them only for a few minutes in the morning and in the evening? From rising till retiring is rather a long spell without an open window. Foul air accumulates, and much fresh breeze from the heights of Zion is excluded, unless there is an opportunity for airing the soul's habitation between these times. If we leave the windows that look toward Jerusalem closed for so many hours, our spirit will become drowsy and even unhealthy. It is good to have a third hour in each day when the door may be closed, and the window may be opened, and the soul may be refreshed by a vision of God.

¶ And here I was counselled to set up one other sail, for before I prayed but twice a day, I here resolved to set some time apart at mid-day for this effort, and, obeying this, I found the effects to be wonderful.[1]

At noon as he lay in the sultriness under his
broad leafy limes,
Far sweeter than murmuring waters came the
toll of the Angelus chimes;
Pious and tranquil he rose, and uncovered his
reverend head,
And thrice was the Ave Maria and thrice was
the Angelus said.
Sweet custom the South still retaineth, to turn
for a moment away
From the pleasures and pains of existence, from
the trouble and turmoil of day,

[1] *Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser*, 208.

From the tumult within and without, to the peace that abideth on high,
When the deep solemn sound from the belfry comes down like a voice from the sky.

The Discipline of Change

Ps. lv. 19.—'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.'

The Psalmist was living in a difficult environment for a man of his temper. He met oppression, and felt the high hand of the wicked. He saw all the sin and sorrow of the city, and lived among violence and strife, where the strong lorded it over the weak. He felt himself a mark for the wicked hatred of those in power; and, worst of all, he had tasted the bitterness of treachery, when his dearest friend, with whom he took sweet counsel and in whose company he had walked into the house of God, turned against him. He seemed to see the wicked suffering nothing, spreading themselves out in prosperity, sitting securely under cloudless skies; while he was buffeted by the windy storm and tempest. His heart was sore pained within him, not merely because of his own troubles, but also because of this hard problem of God's moral government of men. He longed for rest, to get out of the evil city. Better the wilderness than the stress and strain of his present life! The contrast between his own experience and the seemingly easeful, changeless life of the oppressors wounded him to the heart, though even as he states the contrast he has glimmerings of a great truth of life and of spiritual religion, namely that there is a Divine discipline of change and trouble, that these things can be used as the means for the making of saints. He predicts calamity for these same oppressors, who seem above the vicissitudes of fortune; and he sees that their very immunity from trouble has misled them. The seeds of their deepest ruin have been sown in the sunshine of perpetual prosperity. 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.'

1. If we know anything of history and anything of our own heart, we shall admit the great truth suggested by the Psalmist, that when men live a smooth and easy life undisturbed by fear and unbroken by misfortune, the tendency is towards practical materialism, where God is in none of their thoughts, and sometimes even towards an infatuation of pride which makes them imagine themselves outside the plane of ordinary human life. It is the lesson of all religious experience that we need to be most on our guard just when health and peace and prosperity are most fixed and continuous; and it is the lesson of all observation that evil left undisturbed only hardens itself in evil. The discipline of change plays a large part in the moral and spiritual education of men, moving them to finer and larger issues, deepening in them thought and feeling, and driving them to the life of faith and communion.

It is strange that this discipline of change should be such an important factor; for we almost feel it to be unnatural. The natural heart of man longs for peace, and looks to repose as fit and proper. Yet we are played on by forces that make for change and unrest, swirled by the ceaseless flux and flow of the tide. We have no security of tenure, open as we are any moment to any blow, or to be struck down at any corner of the road. We can be affected by endless vicissitudes, or desolated by loss so severe that we cannot bear to think of it. All the metaphors to express life touch on this aspect. It is like the swift ships, says Job, like ships driven out in the darkness, tossed on the storm, battling on to a quiet harbour. It is like vapour on the hills, says St James, like the fragile mist that can be withered by sun or torn by wind. There is no real rest in the world, for body or mind or heart or soul. This condition of unstable equilibrium is of course most evident in connection with outward things in our life, the trappings and circumstances. But the same transiency is seen in inward things also. Even love suffers loss, as the objects of love pass off at the dread call of death. Even faith cannot remain fixed, but has new problems which demand new efforts at adjustment. Thus constant demands are made on us, as we are tossed out of the easy grooves of thought and action which we love so much. We are subjected at every point to the discipline of change, so that the world almost appears to us as a kaleidoscope that changes the picture at every shake.

¶ Some years ago, while I was rambling with a friend in the neighbourhood of the English Windermere, we came upon a house which was surrounded by the most beautiful shrubs I ever saw, and I was naturally led to make some

inquiry concerning them. My companion, who lived in the locality, informed me that, by a judicious system of transplanting, constantly pursued, the proprietor was able to bring them to the highest perfection. I am not horticulturist enough to know whether that would produce such a result or not, but when I heard the statement I thought at once of the manner in which God, by continuous transplanting, keeps His people fresh and beautiful, and prevents them from becoming too closely attached to the world. Its possessions are taken from them. Its friends prove faithless to them. Its relationships are broken for them. Its joys give way in their experience to sorrows. And all this is to keep them from becoming wedded to the present life.[1]

2. We must admit, if we are honest with ourselves, that we need the stimulus of constant change if life is to attain its best results. We settle down in slothful ease and sluggish indifference, with eyes blinded and hearts made fat by the prosperity that knows no fear. Changelessness would only lull the senses and the faculties to sleep. We are kept alert only by the unstable tenure with which we hold life and all it contains. If we knew we would meet only the expected, and always at the expected turn of the road, there could be no expectation at all, no wonder, no apprehension, no fear, no hope, no faith. Experience could bring no education; and all our powers would become atrophied.

As a matter of fact, degeneracy has always set in, both with nations and with men, when prosperity has been unchecked and the sunshine of favour has been unallayed. The great races have been reared through conflict and struggle, emptied from vessel to vessel till they were purified from the lees. It is through the conquest of Nature, and through the conquest of enemies, and through self-conquest that the conquering peoples have been built.

¶ Contrast, for example, the history of China with that of England; one standing motionless for long ages, and becoming an effete civilization, absolutely hopeless as regards the promise of a regenerated future; the other emptied from vessel to vessel, four times conquered, three times deluged with civil war, converted, reformed and reformed in religion, and finally emerging, after more than one change of dynasty, into a state of law, liberty, intelligence, and genuinely Christian manhood, to be one of the foremost and mightiest nations of the world.[1]

The lesson is painted on a large canvas in universal history; and it is repeated to us in miniature in individual experience. Men live only by custom and convention when they are withdrawn from this discipline of change; and to live only by custom is to be drugged by an opiate. Everything that makes man great partakes of the discipline. There is no music in a monotone: there is no art in one universal drab colour. Thought is born of mystery. Science is the daughter of wonder, and wonder is the fruit of all the changes and movements of the world. Religion even has her secure empire in the hearts of men through the needs of men's hearts, chief of which is the need of a changeless centre in the midst of change. In all regions we are trained and disciplined by the surprises of life, even by the precarious hold we have on all that we possess. When we have no changes we fear not God; when we have no lessons which convince us of our weakness we grow self-sufficient and self-indulgent. We cannot do without the sharp lessons; even the bolts that come out of the blue that show us how helpless we are. Every deep crisis of life, with its thrill of joy or its spasm of sorrow, with its message of loss or of gain, is part of God's higher education.

¶ 'Joy is a duty' was her inspiring motto. And the following quotation admirably expresses what she had discovered, both for herself and others, of the blessing concealed in suffering: 'Often when I am carving a block of marble,' said a sculptor one day, 'and when I see the chips flying in all directions, I feel a kind of compassion for the stone, and I try to comfort it by saying, "Yes, I am wounding and hurting you now, but my purpose is to fashion you into a thing of eternal beauty." There is One who is a greater Sculptor than I, greater than Michael Angelo, or Phidias—God. Humanity is His marble . . . pain is His chisel . . . and when I pass through suffering, and see the way in which sorrow shatters my most lovely dreams, I softly murmur, "God Himself is at work in my soul, and in His infinite mercy He is about to enrich and deepen my life far beyond my own imaginings! I thank Thee, my God!"'[2]

[1] W. M. Taylor, *The Limitations of Life*, 367.

[1] H. Bushnell. [2] *The Life of Adèle Kamm*, 115.

Moral degeneracy creeps upon the man or the nation that sits at ease, as the stagnant pool breeds malaria. The water needs to be ruffled by breeze and stirred by storm. We are not fit for the peace and prosperity for which our hearts long. Sometimes even the languid, heavy atmosphere needs the thunder and the lightning and the tornado. If it be so, if to have no changes is to lose the fear and worship and love of God, if to have what we desire is to smother the soul in fatness, then banish the evil dream of ease, the unsanctified longing for rest; rise eagerly from these low levels; move swiftly to every high thought and noble passion and generous service; thus even creating the occasions, welcoming the changes that remind us of God, that recall us to our great vocation as the children of God, who cannot be satisfied with plenty of victuals and freedom from care if the craving of heart and spirit find no satisfaction. The cloudless sky is a mockery if it speak not to us of God. The gaining of the whole world is failure if it means to lose the soul. The light is darkness if it hide from us the eternal world which is our true home. It is a poor thing to have immunity from changes, if by that we have lost our fear and reverence and love of God.

3. The discipline of change is meant to drive us out beyond the changing hour to the thought of eternity, out from the restless things of sense to find rest in God. The deepest lesson is that which the Psalmist reached through all his troublous experience, 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.' He is the changeless in the midst of change, a centre of rest for the restless soul of man. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; the same in Nature, in character, in love, even as Jesus revealed Him, the Eternal Father who yearns over His children in deathless love.

We change so soon—
Love in the morning and forget at noon—
Weep overnight,
And wake with smiles to greet the morning light.

We set our eyes
On some far-distant goal, and, with the prize
Grown near to-day,
Find that desire has withered on the way.

Thou changest not
In all our change! Whatever be our lot—
Though far and wide
We wander, still Thou walkest at our side.

Thou, having set
Thy love on us, canst never more forget—
Nor wilt Thou tire,
For ever, of the end of Thy desire.[1]

'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' If that is failure, even though it means continual peace and prosperity, what shall we say of the failure of those who know the desolation and terror of change and yet have not learned, who still cling to the things of sense that have failed them before, who have suffered all the strokes of fortune, all the pangs of heart, all the shocks that paralyse the soul, and yet have never submitted, never trusted, never feared, never loved God? A more tragic failure than that of our text is to have to say, Although they have changes, yet they fear not God.

Light human nature is too lightly tost
And ruffled without cause—complaining on,
Restless with rest—until, being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
Or a small wasp have crept to the innermost
Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun
Shine westward of our window—straight we run
A furlong's sigh, as if the world were lost.
But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us—we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Aye, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear, submissive, o'er the stormy main,
God's chartered judgements walk for evermore.[2]

Burdens

Ps. lv. 22.—'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.'
Gal. vi. 2.—'Bear ye one another's burdens.'
Gal. vi. 5.—'For every man shall bear his own burden.'

THESE three passages have one thing in common—they all deal with burden-bearing. They show us how there is a gospel in the burden we

[1] E. H. Divall, *A Believer's Songs*, 145.
[2] E. B. Browning.

bear, a revelation that comes with the weight and weariness of life.

'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.' That is the burden revealing unto us the gracious and merciful Divinity above us. That is the weight of life bringing us to God. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' That is the burden revealing the needy, weary humanity all about us. That is the weight of life giving us to our neighbour in the sympathy born of a common experience. 'For every man shall bear his own burden.' That is the burden revealing us to ourselves. That is the weight of life folded in lonely responsibilities, untransferable obligations, and personal discipline. So each passage in turn will stand out before us as in the daily burden-bearing our thought goes upward to God, outward to our fellows, or inward into our own spirit. The weight of life helps us to get hold of the meaning of life. It is this sense of weight, this burden-bearing, against which we are so often found protesting, that is after all no small part of our secret of understanding.

1. 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.' There is a sense in which life is a burden we were never meant to carry. It is too heavy for us. We stoop and strain and struggle, but life is too much for us. We are not equal to it. There is an undeniable inadequacy in the human spirit to meet the whole demand of existence. And herein men think they have found a radical mistake in the constitution of things. That I cannot manage life by myself proves that there is something wrong. Yes, there is something wrong—the attempt to manage it. We were never meant to be equal to life. And every masterful, unmanageable, impossible hour of experience that so often puzzles us and confuses us is just a vindication of that high wisdom which knows that the human spirit seeks the Divine strength through the gateway of weakness and weariness. Prayer is a corollary of impotence. Faith makes its strongest plea when life meets its weakest hour.

But this word about casting our burden upon the Lord refers not merely or mainly to an act of faith occasioned by some special stress of experience, but to an attitude of spirit to be maintained every day, whatever that day may bring. We need to lean hard on the Father's arm and live close to His heart, not only when life is making its greatest demands and sorrow is delivering its most bitter message, but also in all the days of moderated demand and modulated sadness. We need the Divinity above us, not only when some strong sin challenges us to mortal conflict, but also in the days when, with slow unyielding persistence, Satan tries to wear down the defences of the soul. And so this first passage exhorts us to commit ourselves wholly and always unto God.

¶ Miss Fiske, the American missionary, tells this beautiful story. She says that on a warm Sabbath afternoon she was seated on the earthen floor of her mission-chapel and feeling utterly exhausted. 'Just then, as God would order it, a Syrian woman came and seated herself right behind me, so that I could lean on her, and she invited me to do so. I declined, but she drew me back and said, "If you love me, lean hard." Very refreshing was that support. Then came the Master's own voice, "If you love me, *lean hard*"; and I leaned on Him too, for He had preached to me through that poor woman.'

It is not the burden, but the burden-bearer, that God sustains. It is not the heavy sorrow, but the bleeding heart that He takes into His strong keeping. So we can give God our burden only by giving Him our life. At this point the figure of a burden fails accurately to represent the toil and trouble of life, unless we remember it is a burden that cannot be laid down. It is bound to our shoulders by the cords of many necessities, Divine and human; and the answer to our prayer for help does not come in a loosening of these cords, but in inward refreshment of spirit. So this exhortation to us to cast our burden on the Lord and this promise of His sustaining grace speak to us not of an occasional expedient to which the more trying experiences of life may drive us, but of the true relation of our life to God day by day. It is only natural that the greater the trouble the sooner we shall be compelled to look to God for help; but if we are to find Him in the darkness we must go to Him often in the light. There is an old Celtic proverb which says, 'The day the storm blows is not the day to thatch your cabin.' Even so the day of urgent need and unspeakable pain is not the best day in which to commence our quest of God.

¶ 'I find great comfort in God,' said James Russell Lowell in his last days; but to find great comfort in God in the critical hours of life when extraordinary and tragical things are happening, our souls must be prepared beforehand to receive it.[1]

¶ In feudal times the peasantry used to build their little cottages beneath the shadow of their lord's castle-walls so that in time of need they could easily take refuge within the stronghold, and so that by their very proximity to their master's dwelling he might be reminded that they cast upon him the burden of their safe-keeping.

Never a battle with wrong for the right,
Never a contest that He doth not fight,
Lifting above us His banner so white;
Moment by moment we're kept in His sight.

Never a trial and He is not there,
Never a burden that He doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share;
Moment by moment we're under His care.

2. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' We have been talking of the law of the Divine Fatherhood; here we have the law of our human brotherhood. But unless we have some understanding of the first it is no good talking about the second. This word about bearing 'one another's burdens' is not a mere motto of socialism. It is the fulfilment of the law of Christ. It is the service of unselfishness. It involves the leisure of the heart. It is a perfectly spiritual exhortation, and as such it must be received. There is the larger vision involved. A man cannot see other people's burdens when he is stooping helpless beneath his own. The weight of life does not bring a man nearer to his neighbour unless it first of all has brought him nearer to his God.

Just what this burden-bearing means one cannot say, for it means a different thing in each life. It is all that sympathy and faith and self-forgetfulness can do. It is not a pretty sentiment, a mere figure of speech. It is the great and manifold service of love, that needs all the wisdom and strength and patience that we can bring to it, and that can be wrought in a thousand ways. Occasionally this burden-bearing can be done very literally, when we can take on to our own shoulders for the bearing, and into our own hands for the doing, that which for another was too heavy and too hard. But more frequently it must take the form of the indirect and mediate service of sympathy. In the great league of pity and help to which we are all called, and in which, if only we are unselfish enough, we can all find a place, we ever find that the best thing we have to give to the world is our influence. No man liveth to himself. Every life is ever adding to or diminishing the burden of other lives. There is an infinitude of interaction—much of it beyond our tracing; and in so far as we carry through life a cheerful, patient, responsive, and unselfish spirit we shall be doing something every day to make the burden of others easier to be borne.

3. 'Every man shall bear his own burden.' That also is the discipline of life. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. God lets us feel the weight of our own mortality. There are tears He does not hasten to wipe away. There are periods of temptation that must not be abbreviated. Herein we feel the weight of life, and God lets us feel it, that He may not frustrate His own work of discipline in our souls. It is His way of developing our lives and making us strong. The union between ourselves and our Saviour is a yoke. If it were not on His shoulders as well as ours, we should be crushed; but if it were not on our shoulders as well as His we should live dwarfed and undeveloped lives.

¶ The seal of one of those Scottish Covenanters whom Claverhouse imprisoned on the lonely Bass Rock reads 'Sub pondere cresco'—'I grow beneath the load.'[1]

God gives us most in that life that each must live alone. The battle with unbelief and selfishness; the daily revelations of a worthier life that keep us at war with ourselves; the great resolves that grow up in our heart's stillness; the sadness of the irrevocable, and the conflict of hope and fear—it is in these things that God comes nearest to us, and helps us to get nearer to Him and to our brethren.

[1] J. Hunter, *De Profundis Clamavi*, 278.

[1] A. Smellie, *In the Hour of Silence*.

Fear and Trust

Ps. lvi. 3.—'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.'

In ordinary modern civilized life we are seldom placed in situations which give rise to intense personal fear. We have no enemies thirsting for our blood, as the Psalmist apparently had. We daily, indeed, incur risks of injury to life or limb, but we do not think much about them. Accidents, we say to ourselves, occur so seldom; the chances are always in favour of our safety. Still, we can none of us probably say that we are never afraid. The range of fear is too wide for that. We fear many things which do not affect our personal safety. We fear bereavement, or misfortune for those whom we love, or disaster for our country. The anxiety with which men look into the future often tends to deepen into fear as time goes on. Wherever, in short, we definitely see the probability, or even the possibility, of evil coming either to ourselves or to others, there fear can always find a foothold.

1. What does religion tell us about our duty with regard to fear? Ought we to try to get rid of it altogether? Or ought we merely to try to control it when it is excessive or unreasonable? It has sometimes been asserted that men were not meant to fear. But is that true? At first sight, at any rate, fear seems to be a useful instinct, since it works for self-preservation. It seems only natural that so long as there are dangers in the world, the instinct should at times assert itself. Yet there is a curious paradox about the effects of fear. We may say that God meant it to preserve life, but owing to its blind intensity it undoubtedly often tends to destroy life. We see this in the case of those irrational panics which sometimes seize upon crowds. A theatre catches fire, and the fear of being burnt to death results in many people being trampled to death. That, we say, is due to the contagiousness of fear. But is not fear sometimes equally irrational in the case of single individuals? There are times when it flatly refuses to listen to argument. People torture themselves with the fear of quite imaginary evils. They go to meet trouble long before it comes.

¶ 'I have had many tragedies in my life,' said an old statesman, 'and the worst were those which never happened.'

Some of your griefs you have cured,
And the sharpest you still have survived;
But what torments of pain you endured
From evils that never arrived!

Christianity, as taught by Christ, certainly discouraged all fear that is based on unreason. He did an immense deal to emancipate men from superstitious terrors. In the Pauline Epistles attention is frequently called to this characteristic of Christianity. 'God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness.' 'We received not the spirit of bondage unto fear.' But Christianity has done much more than this to limit the domain of fear. The Christian must not merely have no slavish fear of God, he must have no cowardly fear of man. 'Be not afraid of them which kill the body,' says our Lord. That is a condemnation of all the low, unmanly fear of death which men sometimes display under danger, though, thank God, we continually see instances to the contrary. As to the higher and less selfish fears, Christ does not indeed expressly condemn them. Yet when we consider the gist of His injunction not to be anxious for the morrow, we see that He would have us try to put these also out of our minds.

¶ In a playful mood Stevenson writes to Austin Strong a long account of the exorcism of an evil spirit by an old woman who had frightened the natives of Vailima by her ventriloquism. 'All the old women in the world might talk with their mouths shut, and not frighten you or me, but there are plenty of other things that frighten us badly. And if we only knew about them, perhaps we should find them no more worthy to be feared than an old woman talking with her mouth shut. And the names of some of these things are Death, and Pain, and Sorrow.' [1]

2. The question has been asked whether Christ Himself, in virtue of His perfect manhood, ever felt fear. We can hardly help supposing that He was capable of the feeling, but no occasion of His actually experiencing it is very definitely specified. Twice in His ministry

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 264.

we are told that He evaded the violence of the Jews. Once, when He was at Nazareth, His fellow-townsmen tried to throw Him down headlong over the brow of the hill, and — possibly there is a suggestion of some miraculous intervention—' he going through the midst of them went his way.' The second time was at Jerusalem, when the Jews who had gathered round Him took up stones to stone Him, and ' he went forth out of their hand.' On both occasions He showed a desire to preserve His life, but there was an obvious reason for this, for His premature death would have been the ruin of His mission. There is no justification, therefore, for any charge of physical fear or personal cowardice. On the contrary, as we picture to ourselves the scene at Jerusalem—Jesus standing alone in the midst of a circle of fanatical foes with stones poised in their hands for His destruction—and as we think of His fearless words in a situation which might well try the strongest nerves, we cannot but be struck with the great courage which He displayed. Humanly speaking, it seems probable that to His undaunted demeanour He owed His life.

¶ Some one has related that a Japanese General was given the Gospels to read for the first time, and after he had perused them, he was asked what was the quality in Jesus Christ that struck him most. ' His bravery,' was the reply.[1]

Perhaps it is in the Garden of Gethsemane that we come nearest to any evidence of human fear on the part of Christ. The Greek word for agony, where it is used in the Septuagint, always seems to convey the idea of fear, so that by St Luke's phrase, ' being in an agony,' we are perhaps meant to understand ' being in an agony of fear.' We almost hesitate to speculate on the actual facts connected with this hidden secret of the Passion, but it would seem possible that for a moment during the agony and bloody sweat His physical power of self-control may have failed. If the flesh was weak, however, the spiritual strength still remained unimpaired. His prayer was still, ' Not my will but thine be done.' He still was able to feel the support of the presence of His Heavenly Father. Later on, that support may perhaps have been withdrawn. That at least is one interpretation of the pathetic cry from the Cross: ' My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ' Feeling that there was on Him the burden of the sins of the whole world, the Saviour may have succumbed for the moment to all the spiritual terrors which can be impressed on a sensitive conscience by the conviction of alienation from God. On mysteries such as these who shall presume to dogmatize? This explanation may be quite wrong. But supposing that it were true, would not this added touch of fear in the Garden and on the Cross intensify our conception of what the Passion meant? Should we not the better realize that He is not One that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin? As He has consecrated for us human suffering, so perhaps we may believe that He has consecrated for us human fears—those fears which, in spite of all our efforts to control them, we sometimes cannot help feeling at moments of intense strain.

[1] N. Maclean and J. R. P. Sclater, *God and the Soldier*, 135.

3. ' What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' The immediate remedy for fear is trust in God. Trust excludes earthly fear as completely as earthly fear excludes trust. Only by putting our trust in God can we overcome our fears about the changes and chances of this mortal life. The Psalmist's thought closely corresponds with the spirit of our Lord's teaching about fear. Christ does not attempt to argue His followers out of their fears. He does not appeal to their reason: He appeals instead to their loyalty, to their belief in Him and in the loving Heavenly Father whom He came to reveal. It is trust in a Divine Person, trust in the watchful Providence which numbers the very hairs of our head, that He seeks to instil into our hearts. Above all, He appeals to His own presence. Tossed about amidst the waves of this troublesome world, in the gathering darkness of doubt, the Christian sees dimly a mysterious Figure advancing over the water, and hears faintly the Divine message: ' It is I, be not afraid.' Could we but unreservedly trust His promise that He is with us always, how ashamed we should feel of most of the fears that now beset us.

¶ All through life the impression that Mrs M'Laren gave to all who met her was that of

buoyancy of spirit. 'How bright she is,' was a very usual remark. And it was true. But this brightness was not the result of what may be described as a cheerful temperament that saw only the bright side, either in her own life or in the lives of her friends. She was naturally apprehensive, but her simple faith in God and her earnest desire to help those around her counteracted this tendency, so that very few traces of it were seen in daily life. 'What time I am afraid I will trust in thee' she strove to make a blessed reality in her own life, and in the main she succeeded.[1]

One form of fear alone our Lord enjoins on His followers—the fear of God. We are apt to imagine that there must be some inconsistency or contradiction between fearing God and trusting in Him, and yet we can hardly doubt that they represent the same attitude of the soul towards God, seen from two opposite sides. We might call them the obverse and the reverse of the medal. If we were to put the connection between them paradoxically we might say that we trust because we fear, and we fear because we trust. We often feel that we trust in God's mercy, but do we not also trust in His justice? Could we conceivably put our trust in a Supreme Being whose nature was devoid of justice? So, on the other hand, we constantly feel that we fear God's judgments, but is it not true sometimes in a very real sense that we also fear His mercies and forgivenesses? His lovingkindness and forgiveness seem to lay such a responsibility on us, to make so great a claim on our service and devotedness.

¶ Dr Arnold of Rugby once wrote to a friend: 'The sense of so much and such continued temporal mercy is even more than humbling—it is at times even fearful to me, when I look within and know how little truly grateful I am for it.'

Let us pray that we may never cease to feel that fear of God which is at bottom identical with trust in God—the loving fear which is felt towards a Father, the sensitive fear which shrinks from dishonouring Him in thought, word, or deed, the reverent fear which always tries to realize His infinite power and holiness, and the wholesome fear which through the action of the Divine Spirit keeps the soul pure and unspotted from all taint of evil.

[1] E. T. M'Laren, *Dr M'Laren of Manchester*, 119.

¶ Rabbi Duncan's prayers were more than any other man's marked by a sense of the majesty of the holy Lord God, and a perception of the Divine glory. In the earlier period of his course, his view of the Divine glory was often the same as Isaiah's, 'Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts'; and as Job's, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself.' Latterly this holy fear was modified, but it continued to the end; and the enviable epitaph found on some of our old gravestones might most fittingly have been written on his, 'Deceased in the fear of God.'[1]

An Imprecatory Psalm

Ps. lviii. 10, 11.—'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.'

Dr Sanday says that this Fifty-eighth Psalm is not 'what we should call an attractive psalm.' 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the ungodly.' Our first impulse is to say, What could be more unchristian? This is vindictiveness indeed. And the first line of the next verse seems at first sight to bear out the conclusion. But the last line suddenly flames out and throws a new light upon the whole. 'So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.'

'After all,' says Dr Sanday, 'it is not the jealous personal looking for vengeance and reward, but another and far nobler thing. It is the old story. The prosperity of the wicked seemed to cast a cloud over the Justice of God, and therefore over His whole character and relation to the world of men. But at one stroke that cloud is removed, and God stands revealed once more as the Righteous Judge.'

1. The difficulty that we have with these imprecatory psalms is caused by the fact that we treat the Bible as if it were one whole book, whereas the great principle of interpretation is that there are 'degrees of sacredness, that

[1] A. M. Stuart, *Recollections of the late John Duncan, LL.D.*, 40.

there is (as it were) a Bible within the Bible, that everything that is found in its pages is not necessarily Christian, but that certain things were definitely said 'to them of old time; and are as definitely not said to us now.' The Bible is an historical book, gradually developing its rich spiritual life. It grows to completion only in Christ. The fact that the religious teaching of the Old Testament is in many respects rudimentary and defective as compared with that of the New Testament is directly attested by the New Testament itself. According to the opening words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, God spake in time past unto the fathers in the prophets 'by divers portions and in divers manners'; and he contrasts this partial and imperfect revelation, conveyed in different modes, with the full and final revelation made by Jesus Christ.

It was a genuinely Divine revelation which was made to Israel in Old Testament times; it was God Himself who spake in time past unto the fathers in the prophets; but this revelation was partial, fragmentary, gradual, conveyed to its recipients not, as it were, in a flash, but bit by bit and through the imperfect agency of human media. 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'; but, inasmuch as they were themselves human, they were liable to the defects of humanity, and the message which they were Divinely inspired to convey was often imperfectly apprehended, and was set, as it were, in a frame which was inwrought with the imperfection of human thought and passion. Thus, when at length it pleased God to speak unto mankind in the Person of His Son, we find that the scattered rays of the twilight of revelation are absorbed in the full light of the one bright beam, and the shadows disappear.

And so our Lord in His teaching at times draws attention to imperfections in the teaching of the Old Testament, and claims to supersede it—most notably in this very question—the attitude which we ought to adopt in relation to our enemies: 'Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.'

¶ One day the Maréchale was reading to her youngest children the story of Daniel in the lions' den. All went well till she came to the words, 'And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of the lions, them, their children and their wives; and the lions had the mastery over them, and brake all their bones in pieces.' At this point Evelyn, a blue-eyed maid of six, whose face had suddenly become very grave, said, '*C'est assez; ferme le livre*!' (That's enough; shut the book!). Her Christian instinct would not accept the death of innocent women and children. Sir Walter Scott's little friend, Pet Marjorie, commented on a similar passage in the Book of Esther, 'But Jesus was not then come to teach us to be merciful.' It is written: 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'[1]

2. Let us ask how far were the psalmists justified in using the 'language of vindictiveness' to the extent they did? and how far should we be justified in using the same language? How far were the psalmists justified? Three things have to be understood. In the Old Testament period, and especially in its earlier portion, the lesson which God's people had to be taught was, above all else, to love the good and hate the evil. The feeling of righteous indignation against sin was one to be fostered and deepened, and not discouraged. That is the first thing.

The next is, that the distinction between the sinner and the sin was not yet realized. That distinction was reserved for a later age. Remembering this, it is easier for us to understand the strength of the psalmists' language. Even in these days it does not do to be too squeamish. It is more important that the child should grasp strongly the difference between good and evil than that it should express it temperately. For some exuberance of language in the condemnation of sin every allowance should be made.

The second question is, How far are *we* justified in using vindictive language? It is still a question of the use of the Psalter. If you ask, How far are we justified in using vindictive language on our own account, as against others, it is plain that we are not

[1] J. Strahan, *The Maréchale*, 267.

justified at all. No believer in Christ could possibly say otherwise.

3. We take it then to be a well-established fact that the Old Testament is the record of a gradual growth in religious faith. And of the whole Old Testament the Psalms and the Prophets stand out most prominently as of the highest spiritual and moral worth. Of these two divisions, again, it is undoubtedly the Psalms which grip us most closely; the reason being that, while the Prophets are preachers of righteousness to their own nation or to the world at large, the psalmists, for the most part, deal with *personal* religion, and set before us the outpourings of individual souls in communion with their God. It is to the Psalms that we turn instinctively in order to express and interpret our own inmost thoughts and feelings. The spiritual level of the personal religion which we find in the Psalms is an extraordinarily high one. That thirsting after God, that staking of all hopes on Him, and the finding of one's sole good in His society, that rising on the wings of faith into a serener and purer atmosphere, where the dark clouds of earth seem to sink out of sight below and nothing intervenes to dim the sunshine of God's presence—this all represents a grade of spiritual attainment which offers us an imperishable *ideal*.

It is, however, in the higher revelation of the New Testament that we find the words—'Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you.' There we have the great ideal of hating the sin and loving the sinner. As the Christian poet puts it:

> Then marvel not, if such as bask
> In purest light of innocence,
> Hope against hope, in love's dear task,
> Spite of all dark offence.
> If they who hate the trespass most,
> Yet, when all other love is lost,
> Love the poor sinner, marvel not;
> Christ's mark outwears the rankest blot.

The Spiritual Rock

Ps. lxi. 2.—'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.'

The cry of our text is, in its spirit, as old as humanity. It interprets and gives expression to the most fundamental and the most persistent of our human needs. It describes the normal human attitude—our sense of dependence in its noblest form of feeling and experience.

The ancient Greeks had a particular word to denote a man. Its root meaning is upward-looker. There is history in the word, the history of human life. Whenever and wherever man has risen above the brute and has come to himself we find on his face the upward look. As we patiently watch and study our humanity—in its length through the historic past, in its breadth across the world, and in its depth in the most developed souls—the more do we find that the upward look belongs to its essence. In man, and as an essential part of man, we see the promise and potency of religion, the elements out of which the highest form of religion has grown and to which in turn it appeals. It would be easier to deny the tendency of matter to a common centre than the upward movement of the human soul to God. By the whole make and strain of his being and by the deeper necessities of his life, man is forced to cry, 'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.'

¶ 'If we will but listen attentively,' says Max Müller, 'we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite, a love of God.'

1. The text, then, is peculiarly the language of religion and of man as a religious being. Religion is the feeling and sentiment of dependence upon God, upon Strength, Wisdom, Goodness other and higher than human, upon One who will meet and satisfy our desires for guidance and help in every time of need, and to whom we can ever leave in trust so much that is beyond our control. And the emotions, affections, and desires which lift up our minds and hearts, our consciences and wills, into contact with Him can be trusted—if we can trust anything. It is simply inconceivable that the expression which so illuminates and transfigures the face of our humanity should be produced by what has no real existence. As we have no powers without their corresponding objects, as for eye and ear and hand there are things to be seen and heard and touched, so for our religious affections there is the Divine

Reality to which they refer; a God who supplies the answer to our holiest and deepest needs is Himself the answer to the longings and wants and aspirations which His Spirit has breathed into our inmost being.

It was one of our older poets who wrote that,

> Unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

Is it not so? The philosopher said, 'Give me a standing ground outside the world, and I will lift the world.' It is also the cry of every struggling human soul, 'Give me that outside myself by which I can lift myself above myself and it shall be well with me.' There are those who declare that 'the apprehension of scientific laws' will one day take the place of the religious trusts, but that is surely the vainest of all vain dreams born not of knowledge but of ignorance—ignorance of human nature and of the lessons of human experience. Higher than ourselves must be that to which we can look for direction and support. Our science and culture have given us noble gifts, yet what thoughtful man will dare to say that they can take the place of religion? There are moments in life when the wisest and most learned man feels himself as ignorant and helpless as a child, and looks in vain to his science and culture to relieve the darkness in which he moves.

¶ 'I thought over,' said Heine, 'all the great and little inventions of man, but nothing would answer. Then I commended her to God, and composed a prayer that she might read it. She was my mother, and had always loved me dearly, and she was going away from me, and this was all that I could do for her. We are not great,' he adds, 'and our happiness is when we can believe in something greater and better than ourselves.'

Some profess to find in Nature sufficient satisfaction for their deeper needs. It is true we may find God in this visible universe of earth and sea and sky, find much that may give comfort to susceptible souls, but we need more of God than Nature can ever give us. And if there are those who find in the loveliness and grandeur of the world all they truly need, it must surely be that the humanity in them is weak and thin and undeveloped, or that they have never sinned and suffered, never loved and lost.

¶ These words of Richard Jefferies, spoken in his last illness, illustrate the unsatisfying character of the most intimate fellowship with Nature. 'They go on without me,' he says. 'Orchis-flower, cowslip—I cannot number them all. I hear as it were the patter of their feet. They go on and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill. Nature sets no value upon life, neither of mine nor of the larks that sang years ago. The earth is all to me, but I am nothing to the earth. It is better to know this before you are dead. These delicious violets are sweet for themselves; they were not shaped and gifted with the exquisite proportion and adjustment of colour and hue for me. High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.'

But there are others who find it quite possible, so they say, to go through the world without recognizing in their hearts any cravings or wants that are not, or cannot be, satisfied in the earthly round of interests and activities, in human love and friendship. Charles Darwin once gave utterance to the strange opinion that religion is unnecessary to those who are surrounded by domestic affection. A learned judge of our day also made a similar statement—that a man who cannot occupy his mind with science, literature, art, politics, trade, home, and friends must be a poor kind of creature. The exact opposite of this teaching is the real truth. It is the men who are wholly absorbed and satisfied with earthly things, and feel no interest in and no need for experiences of another kind, who are the most imperfect creatures—living on the surface of life, with their finest powers still latent or wasted and worn away. There is in no human being an actual or potential self-sufficiency.

It is a curious and instructive fact that the prophet of one of the best known and most relentless forms of modern unbelief recognized toward the close of his life the craving of the human heart for something higher than itself to which it can look up; and while forbidding the worship of the Eternal Goodness, compiled an ecclesiastical calendar in which every day in the year is dedicated to the remembrance and honour of someone distinguished for genius or nobility of character. Comte saw clearly enough that man can never outgrow religion,

and that religion must have an object, so he raised an image in the air which he called Humanity. 'The human heart,' said George Eliot, 'finds shelter nowhere but in human kind.' Alas! if that were true. While deeply grateful to the Giver of all good gifts that there are those around us to whom we can look up or to whom we can fly in hours of need as to rocks higher than ourselves, it would be the sorrow of sorrows if we had no shelter and support save in men and women like ourselves, no Rock rising above our fellows, no refuge and no rest in a God who is the source and sum of all human perfection. The God we need must be other and higher than Nature and man, greater than the human heart and better than the best.

¶ 'Every refuge but Christ is a refuge of lies,' John Howard enters in his *Journal*; 'my soul, stay thou upon the Rock.' And at a later date he writes to Dr Stennett: 'God in Christ is the Rock and Portion of my soul.'

2. On every side of our nature and life we are made aware at times of our own insufficiency, made to feel that we are the offspring of God and have our being in Him, and that to depend upon Him is the secret of our true independence. The responsibilities of life pressing upon us often make us feel how sorely limited human wisdom is at its best, how much we need a wisdom higher than our own and a direction surer than any which the wisest human counsellers can give. Questions arise which mere mental acuteness and long experience cannot settle. In that tremendous hour when the resources of human knowledge and prudence have all been tried, and tried in vain, it would be ill with us if there were no wisdom other and higher than our own to which we can look hopefully. The Lord of our life may not give us, mediately or immediately, any such direction as would put an end to the striving, the careful discrimination and choice, the perpetual discipline by which we become moral beings, but we know and are persuaded that He cannot have sent us forth with such a nature as ours into such a world as this, to live a life on which hang such great issues, without purposing to bring His own wisdom to our aid. The Divine guidance may demand from us high and continuous effort to fit ourselves to receive it, but it is a sure and blessed reality.

It is on the moral side of our lives that we most feel the need of the Rock higher than we. We are weak, and none of us know how weak until we try to do all we ought to do. Who is so far master of the situation that he never does anything from which his better self shrinks? The man of exalted ideal and ardent aspiration is often feeble in will, and the very loftiness of the ideal and his distance from it brings with it a depression which frequently hinders and baffles him and tempts him for a season to abandon the struggle. Then we have what, to eyes which see dimly, appears to be hypocrisy. But this criticism of an aspiring life is superficial, if not false. We are bound to recognize that there are opposing forces in human nature, and difficulties outside of self, which are adverse to a noble human development. Against these obstacles within and without the faithful soul will strive; but for some temperaments the strife is keener and severer. The man feels not only that he cannot do the things he ought, but that he cannot do the things he would.

¶ The tragedy of a weak and wilful life is set forth in terrible words in Coleridge's confessions—words which came from his heart like the wail of a lost soul: 'Will! Power of will! O God, I have sinned my will away.'

It is when the will is weak, it is when resolutions and purposes strongly framed break one by one in fragments at his feet—it is then that a man feels the need of the invisible protection and defence, of Divine power not to displace, but to reinforce his will; it is then that he cries from a heart overwhelmed, 'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.'

3. The prayer of our text may have two or three possible meanings. It embodies the essence of religious aspiration, it is a cry for guidance, but according to the Authorized Version of the Psalm it is a prayer for shelter and defence from the dangers to which men wandering through a wilderness are exposed. The dangers peculiar to our time and which we have most to fear are not outward and physical, but moral and spiritual. The love of money and power and pleasure, the domination of the senses, and the practical disownment, in the excitement of false living, of the highest and holiest things—it is of these dangers we need most to think, and it is from these dangers we most need to pray for deliverance. And

there are also the dangers arising from the unsettlement everywhere of religious beliefs, from the supposed breaking down of Christianity in our international complications and conflicts, from the increasing burden of living, from the new and larger demands that are being made upon our sympathy, from the knowledge of sins and sufferings which fill so many hearts with a sense of bitter wrong. Never more than now do we need to be led to the Rock that is higher than we. We need the revival of a real and living faith in God. It is not dogmatic definitions of God that we need, not clear explanations of the mysteries of existence, but the strength and peace which come through filial faith and trust. Blessed are the men who are making the troubles of this critical and distracted age serve them by driving them nearer to God—into more intimate and spiritual communion with Him.

Silent unto God

Ps. lxii. 5, 6.—'My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved.'

'My soul!' Here is a man communing with his own soul. He is deliberately addressing himself, and calling himself to attention. There is nothing like the deliberate exercise of a power for making it spontaneously active. Men who come to have keen and discerning vision begin by deliberate exercise of the eyes. It is a good and a healthy thing to stand before a flower and to challenge the eyes to attention. Eyes that are trained in deliberateness come at last to watch instinctively. We may apply the same reasoning to the realm of the spirit. We must challenge our own souls, and rouse them to the contemplation of the things of God. But let us see to it that when we do incite the attention of our spirits we give them something worthy to contemplate. 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease!' That was a most unworthy spectacle to present to the wondering spirit, and it would be no surprise if, after a single glance, the soul fell back again into deeper and more perilous slumber.

1. In our text the Psalmist calls upon his soul to contemplate the manifold glory of God. Let us look at one or two aspects of the inspiring vision.

(1) 'He only is *my rock*.' Here is one of the figures in which the Psalmist expresses his conception of the ministry of his God. 'My rock!' The figure is literally suggestive of an enclosure of rock, a cave, a hiding-place. There are two or three kindred words used in the Old Testament which will perhaps unfold to us something of the wealthy content of the speech which the Psalmist employs. All the words are suggestive of encirclement; they describe the state of being surrounded, protected, and secured. Here is one of the kindred words; 'Thou hast *beset* me behind and before.' How perfectly complete is the suggestion of an all-encircling presence, round about us on every side.

The child, that to its mother clings,
Lies not all safely on her breast,
Till she her arm around it flings,
Sweetly caressing and caressed:
Ev'n so, my God, Thy mighty arms,
Not my poor Faith, shield me from harms.[1]

Here is another kindred word, '*Bind up* the money in thy hand.' You place a coin in the palm of your hand, and your fingers close over it, and the precious metal is strongly secured. It is encircled by a muscular grasp. Let us carry the suggestion into the relationships between ourselves and God. Our Father will secure us as a precious jewel in His own clenched hand. His fingers will wrap round about us, and there shall be no crevice through which the sheltered piece may slip. 'None shall pluck you out of my hand!'

(2) 'He is *my salvation*.' Then He not only shields us, but strengthens us! We are not left by protection in the state of weaklings. We are nourished and developed into healthy children. Salvation is a wealthy and comprehensive word. It denotes not merely 'first aid,' the primary treatment given to those who are bruised and wounded by the wayside; it means also 'last aid,' the bringing of the wounded into strength again. Salvation implies more than convalescence, it denotes health. It is vastly more than redemption from sin; it is redemption from infirmity. This promise of health we have in God. He accepts us in our disease; He pledges His

[1] A. B. Grosart, *Songs of the Day and Night*, 12.

name to confer absolute health. 'Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end.'

(3) 'He is *my defence*.' The Psalmist is multiplying his figures that he may the better bring out the riches of his conception. Defence is suggestive of loftiness, of inaccessibility. It signifies such a place as where the eagle makes its nest, far beyond the prowlings of the marauders, away on the dizzy heights which mischief cannot scale. God is our defence! He bears us away into the security of inaccessible heights. Purity is found in the altitudes. God lifts us to spiritual heights where our very loftiness of thought and feeling is our best defence.

¶ When Mr Handley Page, the famous airman, was making an eastward flight on one of his great machines, he and his companion descended at Kobar, a place in Arabia. There a large rat got on board, attracted no doubt by the supplies of food. On the journey the men could hear it gnawing. They alighted again, and still the rat kept on board. Near Karachi the pilot had a flash of intuition. Those steadily working teeth might not be nibbling the food, but eating away at some vital part of the machine. There was but one thing to do, and he did it. He soared up to a height of ten thousand feet, and the wretched rat, a denizen of hot Arabia, was frozen to death and fell out.[1]

2. In these three words the Psalmist expresses something of his thought of the all-enveloping and protecting presence of God. He is 'my rock,' 'my salvation,' 'my defence.' What then shall be the attitude of the soul towards this God?

(1) 'My soul, *wait* thou only upon God.' 'Wait!' Or as the marginal rendering so beautifully gives it, 'Be thou silent unto God.' We are to be in the presence of God with thoughts and feelings which are the opposite to those of false haste. There is to be nothing of passion or of heated distemper. Loud murmurings are to be silenced. Our own clamorous wills are to be checked. We are to linger before God in composure, in tranquillity. We are to be unruffled. It is the unruffled surface of the pool that receives the reflected beauty of the skies. The reflection is clearest where the life is most calm. How much evidence we have of this in the temper and disposition of the Quakers! They are so frequently, and so long, silent unto God that the very peace of God steeps their spirits, and chastens and refines their manners, gives softness to their speech, and appears to impart leisureliness even to the very activities of their bodies. Would it not be wise for us to copy something of their method, and to linger silently and quietly in the presence of our God? Perhaps we are inclined to talk too much in communion with our God. If silent, our spirits might be the more receptive.

¶ 'One evening,' says Frances Ridley Havergal, 'after a relapse, I longed so much to be able to pray, but found I was too weak for the least effort of thought, and I only looked up and said, "Lord Jesus, I am so tired," and then He brought to my mind "Rest in the Lord," and its lovely marginal rendering, "Be silent to the Lord," and so I was just silent to Him, and He seemed to overflow me with perfect peace in the sense of His own perfect love.'

(2) 'My *expectation* is from him.' Is there not a real significance in the fact that the word translated 'expectation' might also be translated 'line' or 'cord'? 'The *line* of scarlet thread.' The Psalmist declares that, however circumstances may vary, the cord of his hope binds him to the Lord. Ever and everywhere there is the outstretched line!

¶ 'I stood a little while ago by the sea,' says Jowett; 'away over the waters above the horizon, there was the moon shining at the full. Between me and the moon there was a golden line of light stretching across the waters. I walked away down the shore and the line moved with me. Wherever I stood there was the golden cord between me and the lamp of the night. The experience came back to me when I was considering the meaning of the Psalmist's words, "My line is from him."' Whether he was in trouble or in joy, in prosperity or adversity, on whatever part of the varying shoreline he stood, there was the golden track between him and his God. 'Thine expectation shall not be cut off'; the line shall never be broken.

(3) 'I shall *not be moved*.' Of course not! A man whose conception of God is that of 'Rock,' 'Salvation,' and 'Defence,' and who is 'silent unto him,' and is bound to Him by the golden 'cord' of hope, cannot be moved.

[1] Hubert Simpson.

But mark how the Psalmist's confidence has grown by the exercise of contemplation. In the outset of the Psalm his spirit was a little tremulous and uncertain. 'I shall not be *greatly* moved.' But now the qualifying adverb is gone, the tremulousness has vanished, and he says in unshaken confidence and trust, 'I shall not be moved.'

Also Mercy

Ps. lxii. 11, 12.—'God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.'

THAT power belongs to God is, as a rule, the first truth that the human mind lays hold of in its attempt to conceive a first cause. It deifies power. It sees in the *forces of Nature* the suggestion of a personality behind those forces, and the greater the force the more imposing the Deity. This is the primal notion that rude and barbaric tribes entertain concerning God. It is not, of course, the noblest of ideas, but it is a grand moment when the idea of God is introduced into the human mind at all; when a man realizes *something* outside himself, something higher than himself, to which he owes reverence and allegiance.

But while the Hebrew conception began here, it did not stop here. It did include the idea of power, and in the earlier and less pure stages of its emergence Jehovah was simply the mightiest among the mighty, superior to all other deities because more potent than they. 'Who among the gods can be compared unto him?' Even to the Hebrew, at first, Jehovah was only a superior Jove. But we should have owed nothing to the Jew if he had only given to us the conception of a Supreme Power, a God who could thunder more loudly and lighten more scathingly than other gods. Power is not the greatest thing in the universe. Omnipotence is nothing to be reverenced unless it be at the same time beneficent and just. A being with only a spark of moral quality in him would soon out-rival, as an object of worship, a God who was nothing but force. And it was characteristic of the Hebrew conception of God that it co-related Divine power with Divine mercy. In that moment was true religion born, the moment when the discovery was made that the Divine nature included a heart of love as well as an arm of strength; that in God was not merely blind energy, but sentient and sympathetic *soul*.

1. It was the peculiar glory of the prophetic intuition of the Hebrew mind that it penetrated to this idea; that it gave to the world a Deity who could feel as well as create, who could forgive as well as thunder. For merely superficial observation would not suggest this. The emphasis in Nature is on the Divine power. We can always see the evidences of force, but not always the evidences of tenderness. There is much that looks as if there were no heart in Creation at all; as if eternal laws just worked themselves out ruthlessly, inexorably, no matter what suffering is entailed. Let us with reverent candour confess that the Divine method does not always vindicate itself to our limited capacity, that there are terrible enigmas of providential administration which render it sometimes difficult to acknowledge that God is as good as He is great. Indeed there are many among ourselves who cannot always rise to this assurance; not bad people, but people who find it hard to believe in a God of goodness and mercy because their sense of justice is hurt by much of what they see in the government of the world; people who are sceptics because they are morally sensitive, and not because they are morally depraved.

¶ Some of us believe that God is Almighty and may do all, and that He is all-Wisdom and can do all; but that He is All-Love and will do all, there we stop short. And this not-knowing it is that hindereth most God's lovers, as to my sight.[1]

¶ The great poets of our literature have felt this problem of reconciling the Power and Love of God. Spenser meets it in his encouraging stanza upon those who are not left to themselves in the hour of temptation.

And is there care in heaven? And is there love
In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,
That may compassion of their evils move?
There is: else much more wretched were the case
Of men than beasts. But O! th' exceeding grace
Of highest God that loves His creatures so,
And all His works with mercy doth embrace.

[1] Julian the Anchoress.

Browning faced the same problem towards the end of his life in the lines on 'Reverie' more philosophically. His argument comes to this. Intellect sees in the world a Power that is either callous or unintelligent, loveless in its indifference to right and wrong. But the experience of the heart, with its instinct of love, has the assurance that the Love of God will one day be disclosed as strong and central.

> I have faith such end shall be :
> From the first, Power was—I knew.
> Life has made clear to me
> That, strive but for closer view,
> Love were as plain to see.[1]

Now, as it cannot be said that we find this idea in Nature, it is all the more remarkable that these Hebrew seers and poets should have had, not merely a glimpse, but so firm a grasp of it. But they had—and this is what constitutes what we call inspiration—the power to penetrate to a truth not obvious to common observation, or even apparently contrary to common experience. This was the thought of God in which they exulted, and to which they sometimes gave utterance in sublimest fashion ; the great thought that in Jehovah power and love were blended, that they were indeed only two aspects of the same principle. 'He telleth the number of the stars ; he calleth them all by their names.' 'He bindeth up the broken in heart, he healeth all their wounds.' The fortieth chapter of Isaiah is a beautiful poem of reconciliations ; of the reconciliation of the majesty and mercy, the power and tenderness of God. The strength of the Creator, everlasting, inexhaustible, is represented as ministering energy and succour to all the faint and weary ones of earth. We are invited to stand in wonder and awe, as we contemplate the starry depths, with all their host of worlds, marshalled in array by the word of Creation's Lord ; and then to think that the path of every human life is ordained by the same wisdom, and every human frailty succoured by the same strength. The power which upholds a solar system is available for the solace of a stricken soul.

There are times when we want a pre-eminently *strong* God ; when the only thought that can give us comfort is the thought of a Champion, an Avenger ; a 'God of battles,' who will fight for us ; one who will blow with His breath and scatter the hostile Armadas that menace our peace and our liberty. 'He it is that shall tread down our enemies.' But strength alone will not characterize the Deity we crave, and so our hearts turn with eagerness to this 'also' in the text ; 'also unto thee belongeth mercy.' Both qualities are essential to any conception that shall be great enough for all our needs. We cannot find rest in the thought of the power without the mercy, or of the mercy without the power. Our demand is for a strong love, and for a loving strength ; a 'gentleness' that shall 'make us great.' This is the Psalmist's ennobling and spiritually helpful idea of God.

2. But the Psalmist has an enlightened conception of mercy as well as of God. 'For thou renderest to every man according to his work.' That is not at all the conventional idea. It is not what any of us at the first blush would have regarded as the characteristic quality of mercy. We rather think of mercy as 'letting off' the criminal, and shielding him from the deserts of his transgression. But that is an altogether mistaken view. The truest mercy is to let him suffer, and let him learn by his suffering. Otherwise, mercy to him is wrong to the other members of the community. Further, the unkindest thing to any man himself is to leave the roots of evil in his nature, there to spring up and bring forth all their baleful harvest. This is what we do, however, when we only relieve him from the painful results of his wrong-doing. The sooner he perceives the real quality and tendency of his actions, and the more rigorously he therefore seeks to eradicate the last fibre of evil propensity from his being, the sooner will he come to a healthy and happy moral condition.

¶ Plato declares : 'That it is better for a man to be punished than to escape. It saves him from a worse punishment in the degradation of his character.'

¶ In Mrs Ward's *Marcella* Raeburn says of the homicide Hurd : 'I believe that if the murderer saw things as they really are, he would himself claim his own death as his best chance, his only chance, in this mysterious universe of self-recovery.'

And all this arrives through the experience of that suffering which is the inevitable con-

[1] *The British Weekly*, Jan. 19, 1922.

sequence of moral guilt, and the purpose of which is disciplinary and not vindictive. And so the Psalmist mentions as an essential element in the Divine mercy, that it 'renders to every man according to his work.'

Mercy to thee, O Lord, belongs,
For as his work thou giv'st the man.
From us, not thee, come all our wrongs;
Mercy to thee, O Lord, belongs:
With small-cord whips and scorpion thongs
Thou lay'st on every ill thy ban.
Mercy to thee, O Lord, belongs,
For as his work thou giv'st the man.[1]

3. The language of the Psalmist further suggests that mercy is an essential and permanent quality of the Divine nature. Though the word 'belongeth' is not in the original text, the sense is there. 'Unto thee, O Lord —mercy.' It is an attribute, a principle; a fundamental element in the very idea of God. And herein it presents a contrast to much human mercy, which is merely the result of passing impulse or softness of mood, or something, perhaps, not even so estimable as that; for very frequently there is a strong infusion of selfishness in our most benevolent actions. We do not always act from principle, but are prompted sometimes merely by the desire to get rid of the sight of distress. Now God acts from His own nature, and so we read not only that He is merciful, but—according to the prophet Micah—that He 'delighteth in mercy.' It is essential to Him as light is to the sun. And though of His very mercy He sees to it that the seed of transgression brings forth its bitter harvest, yet there is no anger in that ordainment; 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.'

It was this characteristic conception of Jehovah that Jesus embodied in His own life and teaching, and made more beautiful and tender still. It is as it was thus revealed in and by Christ that men see and feel the true attractiveness of the Divine nature. It demands an infinite faith to believe that the God of inexorable law is the God of the falling sparrow; but that was the faith that Jesus held; the faith that sustained Him through all the sacrificial ministry of His life; the faith He preached as the true gospel of rest for human souls. It was as hard for Him as it can be for any of us always to see the beneficent side of the scheme of the universe. Yet He never faltered in His great affirmation. And the way to unravel the secret of the Divine essence is, not to dispute about Christ's mystical nature, but to walk in His footsteps, to live His life.

[1] George Macdonald.

What is Religion?

(For Youth)

Ps. lxiii. 1.—'O God, thou art my God.'

One of the most important questions that we can ask to-day is the question: What is religion? If we should ask it sincerely we should make a good many interesting discoveries that would lead us out beyond current conflicts into the way of peace and brotherhood. But there is another question, which is more personal and even more important than that, and it is: What is *my* religion?

A great many people who are on the fringe of religion have no real religion of their own. That is why they have no conviction and no joy and no power in religion. They have what they call a religion, but it is not a possession; it is not a firsthand experience, it is only a secondhand opinion. They worship God, they believe in God, they have a kind of reverence and affection for religion; but the real reason for all this is that they love their parents, and so reverence their father's or mother's God, and it is not a real religion of their own. Or, again, they have a kind of belief in God, a kind of dim and far-off belief that God plays a part in their life, but it is not a vital or real element in their life.

¶ A blind man who was at the launching of the great ship *Aquitania* said afterwards, 'What a mighty sight it was!' Yet he had never seen a single glimmer of it! Curiously enough, he had somehow the impression that he had had the experience. He had been on a little boat, and he had felt the wave as the great ship slipped into the water. He had heard the cheering of the crowds, he had heard other people around him describing it, and the whole of this experience had fused together in an impression upon his mind. It was a kind of experience, but it was not a real experience.

It was only a secondhand experience that he had caught from other people, because he had not really seen it, and could not see it for himself.

1. How do we begin with religion? We begin with religion as we begin with everything else, by taking it at secondhand. We have to begin with what other people know, with what other people's experience has been. There are young people who say, 'I want to find God for myself,' and that is perfectly right. But they are suspicious of other people's teaching, and they want to put it all aside. That cannot be done with real religion.

If they were going to Australia, they would never say, 'I am going to find my way to Australia by myself, I am not going to take what other people say for granted.' Young people go to the university, and they want to learn about chemistry. They don't begin by saying, 'I am going to make experiments in the laboratory for myself. I am not going to listen to these experts. I am going to find out all about it for myself.' What they do is to sit down quietly and ask what the experts have to teach. It is the same in religion. We can never discover anything that will contradict the real religious experience of other people, and we have to begin just there!

Jesus said: 'Until you come into the kingdom of God as a little child, you shall not enter therein.' Part of coming into the Kingdom as a little child is to ask what other people have discovered about Jesus Christ: patiently and humbly to ask what the great saints and teachers and lovers of men have known and experienced about Jesus Christ. Somebody said we can read Pascal and yet remain a sceptic, but we cannot read Pascal and remain contemptuous of Christianity. And so we have to begin with the experts. Only the real thing is to begin with the best. There are people who say that they will have nothing to do with Christianity because Christianity has been represented by a man who has stood for the wrong side of Christianity. That is not honest. It is not sincere. If we wish to know great literature, we do not begin with the kind of thing that is produced in a newspaper.

¶ Dr Grenfell says: 'I did not realize the value of Jesus Christ, but my mother loved Jesus Christ, and I came to Jesus Christ through my mother's love. I came to Jesus Christ on my mother's authority, because she loved Him, and because His love was the glory of her life. I began like that.'

2. What is the step that leads us into the heart of religion? It is perfectly simple. What is the step that leads us into contact with our earthly father? It is just this, that we believe in our father's goodness, and that we rest upon his plans and purposes for us. That is precisely what it means to trust God. It means to believe that God is good, and that His goodness is the secret of life. It means to believe that God cares for us with a personal love, and it means to rest upon that love and to trust it, and to go out ready to do what that love permits with all our heart and mind. Trusting God with a sincere and open heart, ready to obey what He suggests, asking His guidance and ready to take it, believing in Him, and simply trusting life to Him—that is religion. If we do that, it brings great conviction. It may not happen in a moment, but if we persevere and say to ourselves, 'I am going to discover what is in the heart of this; I am going to trust these people, first of all; I am going to see if there is not reality behind it; I am going to rest my life on it'; then we will get conviction, and it will grow, and a sense of power and of peace come into our life.

3. That is how it begins. But that is not all. Religion does not come to us, and God does not come to us, only by hearsay. In the Bible we find that God was seeking men in their experiences, and it was then their hearts went out to Him. If religion seem unreal, let us remember that God Himself is in our life, God is in our experience—at some part of our experience that we can define and that we can know in our heart if only we will explore our own life.

(1) Let us consider the love of people who have given themselves to us. What is love, when we seek the reality of it? Where did it come from? Isn't that human love which comes into our life something Divine? Or, take the way in which we read a great story of some heroic or unselfish deed: something leaps in our heart, we are filled with the wonder of it. What does that mean? Does not that mean that there is in us a craving for what is

beautiful and perfect and good? That is God seeking us. Every great, unselfish, heroic life that touches us is God bringing us face to face with the Divine reality that is Himself, and that is why men come to God through other people.

¶ There is a story that was told about Henry Drummond, how a man came in touch with him and he brought him face to face with Jesus Christ, not by speaking to him, but just by what he was. This man said: 'Now I always pray to God by way of Henry Drummond.' That did not mean that Drummond was taking the place of God. It meant that the touch of Drummond's nature was like the touch of Jesus Christ.

(2) Or look a little deeper; look at the cravings and impulses that are in our own hearts! Take the impulse of gratitude, for instance. We are grateful for life. To whom are we going to be grateful if there is not a personal God who sent this to us, and to whom we can offer our thanks? Or we are touched with the feelings of adoration. Why should we have the feeling of adoration if there is not someone whom we can adore, who is seeking for our adoration, who is reflecting His wonder and beauty into our life? The fact of the matter is that every need we have presumes an object of these great spiritual needs of our life, these great cravings that make us what we are. They mean that outside of us and reaching out to us there is a God who is seeking us.

There are a great many people to-day who are unhappy, who are filled with unrest. A business man the other day, talking about the modern world, said, 'I do not know what is wrong with the world to-day. People are so easily irritated, they are all on edge, nothing satisfies them.' What does it mean? It means that we are out of touch with the nature of things, and the nature of things is God.

Is the reason why we are not aware of God to-day that we do not take time to find Him? If we sit down sincerely and mean to find the truth, and to discover God, we will find Him. The currents of God's love and God's power and God's truth will find us if only we will think, and let the voice of our own soul get a chance. We will find then that through our own heart and our own life there is a voice that speaks, and that voice we will come to identify with the voice of God.

4. There is another thing just as important as this. God does not come to us in the air. If we sit down and think, we will discover that God comes to us in some element of our own experience. He claims our trust and our obedience and our surrender in some one definite thing. What that definite thing is for us we will know if we are still. Perhaps it is the difficult point of our life. Perhaps it means putting away some fear. Perhaps it means putting some wrong thing right: just as simple as that. When we read the story of Jesus we find that every one of the people that He met had some moral problem in his life that was the root of his unrest. Perhaps we have been seeking something selfish in our life. Perhaps we have to put away some special sin. Perhaps it just means that we must go out and take our stand for God in the face of other people, and God will meet us just there. Perhaps it is some way of service to which God is winning us. God indicates some definite point, and says, 'There is where you and I are going to meet.' And as we trust Him there, as we obey Him there, religion becomes real. One of our greatest thinkers, in a lecture about talking and doing, says that we do far too much talking, which is perfectly true about religion. He says that in nearly every man's life there is some definite thing which, if he would do it, would bring a sense of reality and joy into his life, because he would meet God there. It is there God is asking for our obedience. It is there God is asking us to say, 'O God, from this time thou art my God!'

Communion

Ps. lxiii. 8.—'My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.'

The poet Donne says in a sermon: 'There are some certain psalms that are imperial psalms, that command over all affections and spread themselves over all occasions—catholic universal psalms, that apply themselves to all necessities. This is one of those.' It is truly an imperial Psalm. It reveals and explains the empire over the hearts and souls of men which the Psalms have held. In it we are brought into contact with the highest reach of Old Testament religion and the deepest spirit of the Psalter itself. Nowhere is there such sweet

tenderness and deep feeling; nowhere such intense devotion and passionate love; nowhere such fine expression of exalted spiritual fervour. The heart of all spiritual religion is communion, and the aim of all high faith is communion; and nowhere does communion find such classic expression. The subject of the Psalm is the heart's longing for God and the heart's joy in His fellowship—the need for and the joy of communion.

1. The human need for God to which this Psalmist gave voice demands a similar expression from us. Men may say that man cannot know God, can have no personal relations with the great First Cause. They may say that there is no evidence that God, if He exists, interests Himself in man. They may say that finite man has really no capacities by which he could appreciate the infinite. They may say all that—and more—may say even flatly that there is no God. But they cannot say that man has no need of God, that man has no desires towards God, no instincts and cravings and spiritual wants. All history throbs with the passion of human longing. Heart and flesh cry out for the living God. The need is ours if only to make life coherent and save it from being a tragic farce.

¶ Augustine's *Confessions* before his conversion gives the record of a man of keen intellect with all possibility of the highest satisfaction of mind, yet is frank in the acknowledgment of utter failure to find rest. He was full of longing, full of the torment of unsatisfied desire. He knew even then what he expressed afterwards in immortal phrase: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our heart is restless until it find rest in thee.' For years before he would make submission he could use the very words of this Psalm about himself; his soul thirsted for God, his flesh longed for Him in a dry and weary land where no water is.

But exceeding all that dim and dumb desire, that sense of incompleteness which men feel, is the desire of the man who has known God that he might enter into full communion and that interrupted fellowship might be renewed. The Psalmist's situation corresponds somewhat; for he is absent from the sanctuary where alone he could realize to the full his loving worship. The sense of deprivation brought his sense of need keenly to his knowledge. To his thirsty soul and longing flesh he is as in a dry and weary land where no water is. He comforts himself by happy memory when in times past he had seen God's power and glory revealed in the sanctuary. He would fain be there still, as another Psalmist in similar plight sighed: 'How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.' But this soul refuses to be chained to the material. He has learned that, though distant from the Temple, he is not separated from God. His heart is a sanctuary. Spiritually he dwells in the House of the Lord, and feels that the Divine love follows him. He had valued highly the opportunities afforded by the Temple and the institutions of worship, all the aids to devotion of the sanctuary. But now that he had lost the symbol, he had not lost the substance for which it stood. Religion meant more to him than outward ceremonial, however helpful. He had got past the sign to the reality, and his cry was not for the sanctuary, but for the God of the sanctuary. Every pulse of his being thrills with love of God.

¶ To be with God, there is no need to be continually in church. Of our heart we may make an Oratory, wherein to retire from time to time, and with Him hold meek, humble, loving converse. Every one can converse closely with God, some more, others less: He knows what we can do. Let us begin then; perhaps He is just waiting for one generous resolution on our part; let us be brave. So little time remains for us to live. Let us live and die with God: sufferings will be ever sweet and pleasant to us, while we abide with Him; and without Him, the greatest pleasures will be but cruel anguish. May He be blessed for all! Amen.[1]

2. The Hebrew division of human nature was a twofold division, into soul and flesh or body. When the Psalmist speaks of his soul thirsting and his flesh longing, he means that his whole being desires God; his entire nature, body and spirit, aches for God, as that other Psalmist whom we have already quoted, who had also penetrated past the symbols of religion, said: 'My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' So convinced was the sacred poet here of this that he feels that there is to him nothing

[1] Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God.*

else in all the universe but God and his own soul. For example, life to him is a great blessing. It is the physical basis of all other possible blessings. But he declares: 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life.' That to him is the true life, the only life to be called life. Knowing that, possessing that, he is content, he has all things, he abounds. His soul, as he goes on to sing, shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and his mouth shall sing praises with joyful lips. There has been established between this soul and God a personal relation of communion, which he himself describes in these words: 'My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.' Man's desire is met by God's love. He clings to God and God upholds him: he follows hard after God, and God never lets him go.

3. Did the joy of communion ever find such beautiful expression? Did man ever state it in more winning and attractive form? It is much to know that such a relation has been, that a man has been so near the secret. We feel that this man's words are true. He was a sincere and transparent soul, simply and sweetly and humbly apprehending God, living and walking in the light. We feel that he speaks out of experimental faith. He knows whom he has believed. He has proved and tested his faith, and found it fit to live by. Nay, God's loving-kindness is better than life. Without it there would be nothing to live for.

We have pledges of that love more precious than this pious heart could even dream of. Is the food for the hungry soul less rich and less bountiful in our Holy Communion than when this man sang with joyful lips: 'My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness'? Have we less worthy things to meditate on in the night watches? Were the power and glory symbolized in the Jewish Temple more affecting and inspiring than the broken bread and the wine poured out? Where, then, are the jubilant lips? The Psalmist shames us by his joy and peace and by his devotion and love and spiritual desire. Let us use his example to revive our faith and inflame our hearts with fresh devotion, to renew in us an appreciation of God's goodness and loving-kindness. If we hunger and thirst and long for God, will not we too be satisfied with His mercy? If we can say, 'My soul followeth hard after thee,' we also can be sure of this both now and for ever, 'Thy right hand upholdeth me.'

Pursuit and Rest

Ps. lxiii. 8.—'My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.'

Here, side by side, are two images of faith—the one presenting it as an energetic pursuit and the other as a helpless reliance on a sustaining Power. In suggestion they are inconsistent, and yet they are both true, for a man who trusts God is always clinging and yet he is always striving, holding but also held. If either of these aspects were taken strictly by itself it might mislead, for the truth of human life is two-sided, and Paul bids men 'work out their own salvation, seeing that it is God who works both the willing and the doing of all that gives him pleasure.' Francis of Assisi was not a professional theologian, but he knew what his heart told him, that, in this high business, he was active and passive both; and thus he writes for all who live by faith; 'Though held, I run, pursue and am pursued withal.' 'Alongside of the resting and the rest-giving elements in the gospel,' says Harnack, 'there are other elements which inflame and impel'; so faith cannot exclusively be what William Law calls 'a will and a hunger towards God,' nor yet a sluggish kind of doing nothing that so God may do all. The repose of faith is like that of the fixed stars, which hold their steadfast place in the heavens, not by dull quiescence, but by strength and infinite swiftness.

Let us consider these, as they rise out of each other, and are quickened and inspired by each other in turn.

1. There can be no universal rule, but certainly in many lives it is desire and effort which are first awakened. Men were made in God's image and made for Himself, so it is no wonder if in them stray movings of His Spirit should appear, and strainings after what He is. Into the mind there steals the sense of something high and covetable, towards which, instinctively, a lad reaches out his hands as to a necessary part of life. Such a craving is already a desire for God, though often it remains unembodied, for the man himself scarcely knows what he would be after. An Alpine

climber, if he is to reach the summit, must be up and out upon his way when it still is dark, and he has to scramble on for hours over icy tracks before the sun is fully up; and in this adventure of the soul the same rule may hold, and the upward movement may anticipate by years any statable religious conviction. That is what gives pathos to so much of the deeper life of heathen nations, for under the shadow of ignorance creatures are yet astir, 'seeking after God, if haply they may feel after him and find him.' Such yearnings are not confined to heathen lands. In our own country we come on men and women in whom the ordinary preaching awakens no response; but, none the less, there lives within them a craving, and an ambition after they know not what. The temple of their heart is empty, no god sits there enthroned; but a candle is for ever burning in the vacant shrine.

This attitude may be changed in a moment by the discovery that Another is also seeking. 'We love because he loved first,' says John. When we are still stumbling in the dark, scarcely knowing our way but drawn by some high instinct towards the summits, we find Him come to meet us. Effort and longing then at once are turned to trust, which is a glorious transformation. The knowledge may still be pitifully slender, but that is of little moment. When Archimedes, in his bath, divined the answer to a problem which had for years tormented him, he did not stop because of a swarm of minor questions for which no answer yet was ready. 'He gave one great leap, and shouted—'Eureka! I have found it.' And it is thus the heart of a man should welcome the arrival of faith. With a leap of the soul he may pass from unbelief to knowledge, from blind groping and effort to the simplicity of trust. 'My soul followeth hard after thee, and thy right hand upholdeth me.'

¶ That eminent scientist Romanes tells us that for five-and-twenty years he never prayed. He was crowned with honour in a way that falls to few—and all the time there was a something lacking. It was not the craving of a noble mind that feels every hour how much is still to do; it was the craving of a noble soul that never knew it was yearning after God. Then, in the embrace of love, they met, and meeting, there was peace.[1]

[1] G. H. Morrison, *Highways of the Heart*, 158.

2. After effort comes rest. 'Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is freely offered to us in the gospel.' To any one who has come thus consciously to rest upon Jesus Christ as Saviour there is commonly granted a season of halcyon weather: rough winds for the time are hushed, and with entire gladness of heart he gives himself up to his Lord. If in anything he does not understand, he is ready to give his Master the benefit of the doubt, since the difficulty, of whatever kind it be, must be Christ's concern rather than his own.

¶ In one of the Apocryphal Books it is told of Andrew that, on his way to preach to the cannibals, he found at the seashore a boat with a silent steersman, and in this he launched forth with his companions. But as he watched the straightness of their course, he began to wonder what hand it was that held the rudder: 'For sixteen years have I sailed the sea, but never have I seen skill like this, for this boat is on the sea steady as on dry land.' He found that unknown pilot to be the Lord Himself, who is indeed the companion of every missionary as he starts out upon his work; and the story expresses in the form of legend the noble sense of an absolute discharge from care. Uncertainty and hazard disappear, and men move unwavering towards their goal.

When a man heartily believes in God, he feels that something is interposed between him and the powers that threaten. Even to the challenges of his own conscience he has now a reply, for, 'Thou wilt answer for me, Righteous One'; and when he is ashamed because he cannot speak to God as he ought, it comforts him to think that a Great High Priest is pleading for him. The more he meditates upon the gospel story, the stronger his assurance grows, for he finds in it the portrait of One most fit to be believed. The character of Jesus is a continual reinforcement of his trust, for he sees Him in the record tenacious, undespairing, ready to go all lengths in helping men, and able of Himself to say, 'Of those whom thou gavest me I have lost not one.'

¶ When Newman, still an Anglican, first visited Rome (in 1833) what struck him above all else as 'affording thought to the Christian mind was the remarkable confidence of the Romans in their safety—their *securitas*. They

think nothing can harm Rome. When the insurgents two years since were at their gates, they were not at all excited; they said nothing could harm Rome, and went on just as usual.'

3. Straining and desire—then rest. But that does not mean that men now are done with effort. John Warneck tells of the rude Dyak people that, at first, the human example of Jesus seemed to lay little hold upon their minds. He was from above, clearly of a higher sphere of being than their own; and though they might desire to imitate the missionary, who was kind and whom they admired, they did not dream of being like Christ. But as they made fuller acquaintance with Him and came to know the value of His help, they began to fear lest anything should come between them and Him. Any outbursting of temper or of appetite, any indulgence of laziness, any failure in prayer or duty became formidable since it might at once throw up an obstacle between them and their Master. So out of a better knowledge of Christ a new ambition and effort seemed to spring. That is not confined to the people of the Eastern Seas; for any knowledge of the inestimable value of Christ may work for the reawakening of moral activity. 'My soul follows hard after God,'—following Him closely as those who are afraid of losing sight of Him, and following Him swiftly as those who long to be with Him. It is true that we cannot walk with Him with equal steps, but at least we follow with all the strength He lends us; and at this stage we may more and more incline to think of faith in Law's way as 'a will and a hunger towards God.' Certainly it is a vision and an allegiance—a vision first, a sight of what God is like, but then the offering to Him of life and all its powers—body, mind, affection—in the one desire to please Him perfectly.

4. Desire leads on to trust, and trust to desire and effort; but the last word of all is trust, for as life advances the rest-giving elements in the gospel come more and more to occupy the field.

As the years pass over a believing man, many entangling questions cease to trouble him—not because he has found answers to them all but because he has learned how many things there are he will never understand; and thus with frank simplicity he turns to the few things of which he can be utterly sure. He is sure of God and God's help to erring men, a help that is given even at the cost of sacrifice and the Cross. He is sure that good is the strong thing, and love and light and truth; with these he lives, and for these he is never now afraid. Faith becomes very simple and childlike in a man who is growing old wisely. He rests in God's Almightiness, but that to him is not bare power. When he says, 'Thy right hand upholdeth me,' he means that God's strength is for him used lovingly, that power and kindness here are joined in one.

To this temper of trust we should all of us seek to attain, and, indeed, short of it there is no possibility of rest. When Goethe was a very old man he wrote, 'It is in Islam (that is, in submission) that we all live, whatever the particular form may be in which we catch at courage.' Submission: but ours should not be blind or slavish, it is trust in One whom we know and love, and who loves us.

Doubt

Ps. lxiii. 8.—'My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.'

Doubt is of two kinds. There are many who are not really honest doubters. It is not width and penetration of intellect that is the real cause of their uncertainty, but some deep inward recoil from the Christian standard of Justice, Purity, and Love. But we must limit ourselves to the 'honest doubter' of whom the poet wrote:

> Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
> At last he beat his music out.

The doubt which is sincere and honest, and which is ever seeking to pass beyond itself to certainty, may well be considered part of the Providential discipline of the soul. It is the simple truth that most of those who are to-day leaders of Christian thought have had to pass through doubt, and that to-day they look back upon it, not as they look back upon times of moral failure, but as a time when nearly all that is alive in their present Christian faith came into their spirits. The causes for such doubt are in truth deep seated in the whole life of the age.

1. Whatever be their cause, doubts exist only to be overcome, for it is only as we overcome that we can overcome the world. It is only when we can say, 'My soul followeth hard after thee,' that we can hope to experience the truth of the other saying, 'Thy right hand upholdeth me.' We stand to the undiscovered truth in the same relation as we stand to the undiscovered way of duty. When an honourable man sees himself approaching an hour of critical decision, and knows not clearly what will be the path of duty, he puts the gaining of clear light on that vital matter before all other interests. So is it with the search for God. If He is worth seeking at all, He is worth seeking with the whole soul.

2. We can never really understand Christianity until we realize that, if we give it up, we have a much larger problem on our hands—the eternal riddle of the world. Briefly stated, that problem is this, that the world has brought forth a being nobler than herself, whom she yet perpetually seeks to destroy. No one doubts to-day that man came out of Nature. Man may be more than this, but this at least he assuredly is, a child of the great Mother. But, unless he is to deny all that is highest in him, he knows that he is nobler than the natural order which brought him forth. Like Pascal's thinking reed, he knows that his being is of a quality higher than that of the unconscious unthinking world around him. Still more plainly is this true when we regard him as a moral being, able to discern ideals of conduct higher than Nature shows; and not only to frame them, but to lay down his life for them. Nature cannot do that, but her son can; and there is that in him which irresistibly assures him that here he is possessed of a higher value than she.

¶ We never think of any act of an animal in terms of moral condemnation, but there is quite a new element in our condemnation of human wrong-doing. To quote Mr Chesterton's well-known saying: 'If I see a man taking too many glasses of whiskey, I lay my hand on his shoulder and say, "Now be a man"; but if I see a crocodile eating too many missionaries, I do not lay my hand on *his* shoulder and say, "Now be a crocodile!"'[1]

But—and here is the crowning mystery—Nature seems to be constantly seeking to destroy the nobler being whom she has made. She is at once his nurse and his destroyer, and at the last invariably smites him down with death. More sinister still is the way in which, using all her ancestral hold upon him, she seeks by mighty inward impulses to break down that ideal life of Justice, Purity, and Love after which he aspires. How often the ape and the tiger within him overpower the soul! Here, surely, is a great riddle. Note, too, that it is much more than a riddle for thought; it is a riddle for life.

3. Now, it is not possible to give the full Christian answer to this great riddle of the world—an answer which, as Christians believe, was revealed by God Himself, who in His Son has given us both the intellectual and the practical solution. In brief the answer is that Nature is but the first act in the great drama of the ages, that human life, as we know it, is the second, but that the full development lies beyond in a vaster Unseen World. It reveals that this Unseen World lies behind Nature, that man derives his essential being from it, that Nature is but its manifestation, and exists for it in order, above all, to bring into conscious life a world of human spirits, and to train them through history for a destiny which lies beyond history, and, further, that that training is largely by conflict. It teaches that this great Unseen World is itself centred in, and sustained by, One whom it believes to be the Almighty Father of all, who is ever seeking to come nearer to His children and to draw them freely into closer communion with Himself through all the discipline of Nature and of History, and who, in the fullness of the time, came into human life in a new way in the person of His Son to redeem and regenerate those children of His, and lift them thereby to a new plane of fellowship with Him through the continued life among them of His creative Spirit. This is the Christian solution of the great riddle of the world.

4. Is it true and is it sufficient? Let us content ourselves with indicating what are to-day the two vital points, the place where the strain is greatest, and the truths at issue most essential. We may call these problems (1) God and Nature, and (2) God and Christ.

[1] D. S. Cairns, in *The Student Movement*, xxx. 150.

(1) *God and Nature.*—It has been already said that Nature has produced a being nobler than herself. Is this true? Philosophical argument is here impossible: let us take instead an illustration. Some years ago a student in a northern college deliberately gave his life for another. He was sitting reading on the beach beside his native town on an autumn morning, preparing for the winter session, when he saw a lad getting into dangerous water. He warned him in vain. Then, seeing him in extremity, he swam out to him with a board, to which he struggled long to lift him, succeeding at last when his strength was almost gone. Then, his sacrifice complete, he sank and gave up his life in full view of his home. Think of that scene—the great Nature system, sun and sky and ocean, and, in the midst of that mighty whole, one tiny speck of humanity laying its life down. Is there not something deep within us which tells us that here there is something nobler in quality than all the racing currents and whelming waves that beat it down? But consider well what is here involved. We must therefore either interpret that action in terms of Nature, or Nature in terms of that action. Either it is simply part of the great Nature system, as much part of it as the shrieking gulls and the flying spray, and therefore without any qualitative difference; or else we must be bold and say that the Nature around him existed in order that the man might do this thing and body forth in the World of Space and Time something of that Divine Eternal World from which he came and to which he was going by the grey sea gate. Say that, and in a moment you have passed to the idea of a World instinct with Purpose, and a living God behind the World, 'bringing a son into His glory,' and making him, like His Master, 'perfect through suffering.' For in the end of the day we must believe that at the heart of all things, and controlling all things, there is One 'whom we describe least imperfectly when we call Him Personal.'

¶ After this I returned into Nottinghamshire again, and went into the Vale of Beavor. One morning as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me, and a temptation beset me, but I sat still. And it was said, 'All things come by Nature,' and the elements and the stars came over me, so that in a manner I was quite clouded with it. But as I sat still and said nothing, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope arose in me and a true voice, which said, 'There is a living God, who made all things.' And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all; my heart was glad, and I praised the living God. After some time I met with some people who had a notion that there was no God, but that all things came by Nature. I had a great dispute with them, and overturned them, and made some of them confess that there is a living God. Then I saw that it was good that I had gone through that exercise.[1]

(2) *God and Christ.*—We have seen that out of Nature from the invisible and eternal World there comes—the Soul, and that with this apparition of Personality history begins. Eternity has struck through Time and immeasurably increased the range and splendour of the story. For, great as Nature is, man is greater and more marvellous still. Something new concerning the great hidden source of all things is revealed in him. But what depths of blackness, what gulfs of tears, there are in the story, as well as what high altar summits burning with the fires of dawn! Surely the riddle of the world haunts us still? Is it not supremely needful that into history, as before into Nature, there should come a new influx from the great Eternal World, something which shall do for the soul of man what the soul of man did for Nature, the Divine entering it in a more intimate way? If we have come to believe in the soul, we have come, if we know it, to believe in God. If we seek with all our heart, we shall surely find Him. For in a true sense we have already found Him. A great doubter and a great believer has expressed this thought, 'Thou couldst not seek me unless thou hadst already found me.'

There is that in us which recognizes God when it discovers Him. How could it recognize Him unless it had already divined Him? And how could it have divined Him unless He had already drawn near? Can He have begun to reveal Himself, then, only to leave His work undone? Shall we not rather say that He is in all this unsatisfied longing of the Spirit, this famine for truth which drives us on? Hold to justice, truth, and love, seek Him undiscouraged, and you shall surely find Him. But when you have found Him continue to seek

[1] George Fox.

Him! Viewed on its inward side, the Christian life is one long search for, and discovery of, God, and on its outward side one long revelation of Him. But how shall lives so conscious of fault and guilt, lives, moreover, so ignorant and weak, enter into any kind of living communion with such an One as He is? There is always something of this difficulty when the lower and weaker seeks the friendship of the higher. If I desire the friendship of some great man, I may by persistence make my way past his servants into his presence. But on such terms I can get only an interview, never a friendship, an interview burdened for me with the sense of intrusion. But the whole situation is morally transformed when he persists in seeking me. So is it, on the Christian view, with God in Christ. Here God comes right into the world of human sin, comes, as it were, right through it, bearing its scars upon Him, to the soul behind the sin, that He may break through to me, seeking my friendship!

Here, in this Divine initiative, is the moral and spiritual foundation of the Christian view of the purpose of human life, the attaining of a new and more intimate type of communion with God. Here only do we begin to see light breaking through that tremendous riddle of the world, and ideal Beauty and Truth and Love gaining substance and form, and feel the paralysis of the soul vanishing, too, with that new influx of life and hope which always comes with the vision of God. In the strength of that growing verification we can hold on to the central fact of God in Christ and progressively solve the difficulties which must needs remain. When a man has won through to such living faith he *knows* that he has the clue to the world labyrinth. He knows that in principle he has within him that which can overcome the world. Looking back on the way by which he has come, he can say with humility, 'My soul hath followed hard after thee,' but with gratitude and awe, 'Thy right hand hath upheld me.'

Stillness

Ps. lxv. 7.—'Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.'

The master ideas of religion are rest, peace, trust. Its gifts are a quiet heart, freedom from care, a life with deep, abiding satisfaction at the soul of it. The Master Spirit of the religious life, who alone held the key to all secrets, and diagnosed all needs, offered this as His supreme bequest—My peace I give unto you. He conceived it to be His work to exercise sovereign authority over this welter of human misery and unrest, and unsanctified ambition, and seething discontent:—

> And bid its angry tumult cease,
> And give, for wild confusion, peace.

He came to still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people. And His was not the peace of mere repression and restriction. It was not a quiet maintained by force, and established by fear. It was a peace through satisfaction; it was harmony within a higher order. Light is the commanding force that resolves chaos into cosmos; something as gentle, noiseless, intangible as light. It is the Light of the world that is the Saviour of the world; because it is the Darkness of the world that is its destroyer. The eternal miracle of Christianity is when the noise of this human tumult—its passions, its brutalities, its blasphemies—goes down before the 'Hush!' of Christ. Just as the vindictive spirits were driven out of men abashed by His searching inquiry, even so He stilleth the noise of the seas and the tumult of the people. But the deeper work of His spirit is in the supplanting of that spirit of malice, and hypocrisy, and unmercy, by the spirit of love, and truth, and deathless sympathy.

1. The power of the Lord is most declared in this—that it is He that 'stilleth.' He appears before us as the Father of all, whose influence composes and tranquillizes the agitations and excesses of His children. When we consider what trifles seem to distemper the brain and inflame the soul, we begin to think more seriously and thankfully of this truth as to the Divine control. Life is so easily fevered, the germs of disease are so minute. It is so easy to communicate sickness, and so difficult to cure it. Sin is so simple a thing. It is a fall from the height to which we have climbed; and, once fallen, how hard it is, bruised, shaken, wearied, to toil back to the old vantage again. To the victim of disordered passion the very

sight or smell of drink may so inflame the desires that he will lose all self-control. Then how patient and difficult a work it is to bring him back under true self-discipline again. It is so easy to excite and inflame; it is so difficult to subdue and to control.

They have been little in God's hands who are never still. They have been little under His teaching who have never heard a still, small voice. We firmly hold that God is in the busy hours and busy lives of men, a Presence faintly perceived, perhaps, but most indubitable amid the rush, and whirl, and stress of modern business. But we do not believe that that man is a true son of the Eternal for whom He never 'stilleth the noise.' If we are truly in God's hands there will be times when He will create a silence about us, so that He may speak more plainly, and that we may think more sanely and well on the great issues of life. If the waters that run deep are still waters, the hours of greatest depth, of insight and feeling are usually still hours—hours when we 'will' the deeds which we have afterwards to 'fulfil' 'through hours of gloom.' Even the atmosphere of worship and the associations of the sanctuary cannot always 'still the noise' of the world in our souls. The voices of the market-place intrude even there. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We cannot leave our business problems, our domestic troubles, our political uncertainties, in the porch outside, and enter in with an absolutely quiet heart. Only if we have the vision of the majesty and beauty of God; only if the wonder of His redeeming love be ours, are lesser and lower thoughts superseded.

2. It seems to be necessary to insist on the truth that God's stillness is not lifelessness. There is a stillness that is of the Dead Sea—terrible, drear desolation. But there is the stillness of the sea which is yet bright and beautiful in the sunlight, sparkling with wavelets. These are the times when the sea impresses you with its infinite reserve of power—a 'mighty Being,' with a mighty voice, and yet subdued to the gentleness of heaven. No one would confound Quaker gentlehood with the abdication of character, or even the repression of the moral and spiritual life. We know better. The peace of Christ destroyed no individuality in His apostles. They were not less rugged, less forceful, less distinctive, after they learned His secret than before. They gained, not lost, in character. But they lost the old, ineffectual unrestrained passion; they lost some futile ambitions; they lost many vacillations and agitations from fears and troubles that afterwards never caused them an hour's disquietude. And they found constancy of life and tranquillity of spirit, which no storms and tempests through which they had to pass ever interrupted.

¶ George Gissing once remarked that 'all the great deeds of a spiritual kind had been performed by those who had learned how to lead a life of thoughtful stillness.' [1]

3. It is something of a test whether we care to be alone with Christ, whether we have any real enjoyment of the companionship of God and Nature. There are people who are miserable when they are away from 'the central roar' of the city life. They have not the power of getting away from their absorbing business interests. They are bored to death by the country. They have no patience to read books. The tumult—that is all they ask! The more exciting, the better. Give them the rushing, fevered life, and they ask no more. But deliver them from the humdrum of the great, tranquil, solid work of life, in which the element of chance is reduced to the minimum, and where the soul is not so lost to the love of gain as to have no taste and no leisure for quiet, and for thought, and for prayer! Thought and prayer—these are Christian tests. Thoughtless life and prayerless life—that is a tragedy. Certain it is that that man is not Christ's man who cannot be alone with God.

¶ 'If you are never alone with God,' Al Ghazzali says, 'it is not because you are too busy; it is because you don't care for Him, don't like Him. And you had better face the facts.' [2]

Somehow, the most difficult counsel possible to man is just this—'Be still and know that I am God.' Be *still* and *know*! That does not suit our modern ideas. Knowledge is a matter of eager, restless quest. Well, some knowledge is, but not the highest. But let us bring our restless, troubled hearts to the Lord and Master of us all and discipline ourselves to take His yoke upon us, and learn of Him, and so find rest.

[1] *Public Opinion*, Sept. 2, 1927. [2] A. J. Gossip.

¶ There are no lines of Robert Browning's more appropriate than those which he wrote to the exquisite picture at Fano, of the guardian angel teaching the child to pray. He appeals to the 'Dear and great angel' to leave the little child, and come to him, and find in him 'another child for tending.'

And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.

Morning and Evening Joy

Ps. lxv. 8.—'Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice.'

Blending with the song of praise for a bounteous harvest there sounds through this Psalm a song of praise for national deliverance. It is in the section of the Psalm which celebrates the political deliverance that we find these words. And if they are to be interpreted in close connection with the paragraphs of which they form part, then it must mean that, by the marvellous deliverance which He had wrought for Judah God had filled the whole land, from the place of the sunrise to the place of the sunset with songs of thanksgiving and joy. But there is no need so to limit the reference. The remembrance of God's goodness to Judah flashes into the Psalmist's soul the truth that God is always good, that from the outgoings of the morning to the outgoings of the evening, from first to last, His tender mercies are over all His works.

Why does the writer lay emphasis on the morning and the evening, the dawn and the twilight? It may be that he meant that God was good and loving all the way through (at any rate, that is the central message of Holy Writ), but what he says is that joy characterizes the morning and the evening. And it is in that sense that old Matthew Henry interprets the verse. 'It is hard to say which is more welcome to us,' he declares, 'the light of the morning, which befriends the business of the day, or the shadows of the evening, which befriend the repose of the night. Does the watchman wait for the morning? So does the hireling earnestly desire the shadow.' There is a joy of the morning, says Matthew Henry in effect, and a joy of the evening. There is a joy of the morning; it is the joy of renewed strength and multiplied power. We are fresh and strong in the morning, and we go to our day's task with zest and courage. And there is a joy of the evening. We get weary of the day's toil, and there is no hour so welcome to us as the hour of respite and release. Tired and hard-pressed men and women are glad when the hour of rest arrives.

But let us widen the reference, and interpret the verse, not of these passing days of ours, but of human life. In the deepest and truest sense there is joy all the way through life. There is a joy of the noon and the afternoon, but it seems as if God has conferred a special joy upon the beginning and the ending of life. The best of life is at its start and at its finish. Midway there is a time of stress, and strain, and conflict, and disappointment, and sometimes of defeat, but God makes the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice.

1. *The Joy of the Morning.*—There is nothing for conjuring up golden dreams and entrancing visions like a little child's cradle. Every child is a bundle of hopes and possibilities. There is an exquisite joy for the parent in the dawn of a child's life. And so there is for the child himself. There are no such days for sheer, unalloyed happiness as the days of childhood.

¶ 'I remember,' writes one, 'seeing Bim running fleetly at one year old, saying, "*happy*,

happy, happy.' And his mother tells us that one night, when he was sleeping with her, as she entered the room he turned on his pillow, 'Isn't it nice?' he murmured.

'What?'

'Well—*everything.*'[1]

No doubt children have their little vexations and troubles, and tears easily and quickly come; nevertheless, there is not one of us who has got up into middle life who does not know that there are no days like childhood days. We began, like those who are children to-day, in the garden of innocence and delight. But, before very long, we, too, ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and, as a result, we found ourselves out in a world of briars and thorns. We have scarcely known what unalloyed happiness is since those early days. Thank God, this time of pure joy and delight comes for us at the beginning. The child lives in a kind of wonder-world. Every day Nature reveals to him some of her secrets. He is always discovering new beauties and marvels. And in those childish years sin has done nothing to mar the sheer delight of living. That is why we rejoice in every effort to safeguard childhood and to prolong its years. That is why we rejoice in Factory Acts and Coal Mine Regulations; and that is why we sympathize with every effort to raise the school age. The labour and toil of life will begin early enough without trenching on the innocent and beautiful years of childhood.

Even when childhood is left behind, youth also has its joys. Youth is the time of energy and hope. We all start with splendid aims and generous ambitions. We never dream of defeat. Just as we are told that every French soldier carries a possible marshal's baton in his knapsack, so we start our active life with an unbounded optimism and the most daring hopes. When Cobden, early in his public career, was told that a given project was impossible, he remarked: 'Then, if that is all, we had better set about it at once.' That is the youth's spirit. Even the prospect of battle does not daunt him. He starts out with colours all flying and the bands all playing. He is going forth to conquer the world. It is perfectly true of this life of ours that about its beginning there is a glow and a beauty like the rose-flush of an Alpine dawn. 'Thou makest the outgoings of the morning to rejoice.'

But life's morning soon passes. The careless days of childhood are exchanged for days of toil, and care, and responsibility. And the dashing, brilliant hopes of youth are often disappointed. Instead of conquering the world, the young fellow finds himself conquered by it. Instead of being a marshal in the army, he remains a private to the last. He wins neither the fame, nor the fortune, nor the place of which he had so fondly dreamed. Not one of us, not the most favoured of us have got out of life all that we hoped. But set the more favoured ones aside; there is a vast multitude of men in our midst disillusioned, disappointed, broken in spirit. Life has been to them a very different thing from what they expected. They hoped for glittering prizes and they have drawn—blanks! After the happy days of childhood there come for every one of us days of stress, and strain, and disappointment, and temptation. Sin, and sorrow, and anxiety, and defeat rob life of its zest and joy. So that there are multitudes of men who say of their days that they have no pleasure in them. The morning that broke so brightly has developed into a day of cloud and gloom.

¶ 'Wait till I'm a man,' J. M. Barrie as a small boy used to say to his mother, 'and you shall lie on feathers.' As a mere boy he dreamed of conquering the world and winning comfort for her he loved the best. But it is not every man that succeeds as Barrie did. Most of us find the conquest of the world a harder thing than we thought.[1]

2. *The Joy of the Evening.*—As our life's sun gets towards the west, the clouds break, and the sky clears, and at eventide it is light with us. There is a joy of the evening as well as a joy of the morning. There is something infinitely pathetic about the way in which busy men will talk about 'retiring.' We all talk about it. It is one of the visions we hold before ourselves to the last. We promise ourselves that after a few more years we will shuffle out of our various tasks and labours, and give ourselves a quiet and restful life's evening. Often enough, however, it fails to come. But assuming that we realize the quiet time upon which we have set our hearts—that is not what

[1] Pamela Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant.*

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of the Sovereignty*, 307.

constitutes the joy of the evening. For if that were all, the joy would dwindle as the years passed. No, the real joy of the evening is the joy that God alone can give us. It is the joy that comes from the infinite promises of God. It is the joy that comes through knowing that, if the earthly house of our tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It is the joy that comes from the vision of the land of far-stretching distances; it is the joy that comes from knowing that the best is still to be. It is God who makes the outgoings of the evening to rejoice. And so it comes about that the last days of the Christian are his best days. His noon and afternoon may have been a hard and trying time to him; it may have been a time of disappointment and failure. But he looks forward, and knows that when he is in God's own presence,

> Then shall he taste and feel and know
> All he desired or wished below,
> And every power find sweet employ
> In that eternal world of joy.

It may have been a time of hard, and grinding, and wearing labour; but he looks forward, and he knows that in the Father's home he shall have perfect rest and peace. And so his evening is not a time of gathering gloom, but of brightening glory.

¶ Now I saw in my dream, that by this time the pilgrims were got over the Enchanted Ground; and entering into the country of Beulah, whose air was very sweet and pleasant, the way lying directly through it, they solaced themselves there for a season.

In this country the sun shineth night and day; wherefore this was beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair; neither could they from this place so much as see Doubting Castle. Here they were within sight of the city they were going to; also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof: for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of heaven. In this land also the contract between the Bride and the Bridegroom was renewed; yea, here, 'as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so doth their God rejoice over them.' Here they had no want of corn and wine; for in this place they met with abundance of what they had sought for in all their pilgrimages. As they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound.[1]

Harvest

Ps. lxv. 11.—'Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.'

The harvest season is a beautiful and a wonderful time; it fills us not only with gratitude for the goodness of God, but with amazement at His prodigality. There is no beauty or lavishness like that of Nature. Man can make nothing so beautiful as the flowers and trees that grow in any country lane. When Christ looked upon their beauty one spring day in Palestine He turned to His disciples with the memorable words: 'They toil not; neither do they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' Man is clever and skilful above every animal on earth; but the beauty of Nature far surpasses anything that he can make; and behind it all there must be some Mind ever active in the process we call life. We think that we are beginning to understand some of the machinery of life; but its true nature, its essential quality, remains a mystery. We can but say, 'Thus flowers grow: in this way they have been developed.' But behind our knowledge lies unknown Creative Power. Unknown: yet felt at times as our souls thrill at the sight of beauty. So the beauty of the flowers tells of One who made them beautiful. Thus we are led to God who made the whole world and all things in it, both great and small. He is the eternal Mind who made the sun and the stars, the earth and all that is upon it. He made men just as He made the meanest insect of a day. It was when the Psalmist was led to such thoughts that he could cry: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.' Nothing is too great for Him to have made: nothing is too small for Him to care for. In the tiniest object of creation, in the minutest form of life, there is a rich and splendid delicacy. Every kind of living thing is an example of the skill and power that sustain creation. Thus from the

[1] Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

beauty of the flowers and the wonderfully adjusted machinery of animal life we are led to know God, the supreme Creator of the Universe in which we are placed.

2. In the next place the harvest reminds us of our dependence on the bountiful goodness of God. 'The eyes of all wait upon thee,' cries the Psalmist, 'and thou givest them their meat in due season.' This is a fact and yet some of us may think that surely we owe these to man. Do we not possess wheat because, many thousands of years ago, man began to cultivate a sort of grass with large seeds which still grows wild upon the slopes of Mount Hermon? And then unknown pioneers gathered the best ears of corn in their fields and used them at the next time of sowing. Gradually by careful choice of seeds the better kinds of wheat were produced. So man's thoughtful care received its reward, and still the process goes on. Of late, as we know, seed experts have bred splendid new varieties of wheat which will resist disease and yet yield an abundant crop. Gardeners, too, have taken crab apples and tended them until the apples that we buy and use have been produced. Few wild fruits are good to eat: none so good as those grown by the art of man. Moreover, corn and fruit will not grow without man's constant care. Trees must be pruned and grafted. Fields must be manured and cleaned. Men must plough, sow and reap.

It is all true. An old Latin proverb expresses it well: 'Man plants, man waters, but God gives the increase.' Man co-operates with God in Nature to obtain the harvest. Both are, as it were, partners in a common effort. But God's is the more important part of the work. Our harvest, for all our efforts, would be nothing but for the constant bounty of Nature which expresses the goodness of God. He has made corn and fruit to grow upon the earth. It is His doing that like produces like, that we do not 'gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles.' All the laws of growth are His laws. We forget, in thinking of our discoveries, that we do but find out how God works. The very brain of man which discovers God's laws is given to him by his Creator. It was God's intention that man should thus use his brain to feed and clothe his body. Such use leads to the upward progress which God set men on earth to make. Yet behind all that we do God reigns supreme.

The seed was spread in the furrowed earth,
And nurtured long in the gloom it lay,
Till the beckoning hours led on its birth
And drew it up to the laughing day.
The young spring soothed and cherished the blade,
And summer 'stablished the stately stem,
And the Lord was glad of the thing He'd made,
The fair green ears and the fruit of them.

Summer had worked her will, and past
With her world of green, and autumn arose
And over the prospering tillage cast
A glory of change; the marshalled rows
Of bearded barley and four-square wheat
And pale oats, bearing a hundredfold,
Ripened under her shapely feet,
And out of the green ear grew the gold.

God, how wonderful this the thing,
The new-old miracle Thou hast done,
This proud triumphant fashioning,
Through rains and wind and shine of the sun,
Of ripe and rich abundance, borne
To-day to the sheltering homes of men;
For us Thy spirit among the corn
Has moved, and one has grown as ten.[1]

Sometimes we doubt the goodness of God, and say, 'Why does He allow us to be injured? Why does He permit tempests to beat down our corn or insect plagues to destroy our fruit?' He is not good. He does not care! Religious men have often felt what the Psalmist expressed when he said: 'Then thought I to understand this, but it was too hard for me.' We have to accept the fact that there is evil in the world just as there is sin in men. Yet we can see that it is through evil that God trains us. If his food came to him without labour, man would be idle. Man has become what he is by fighting against the evil that is in the world. Our constant struggle to live has made us what we are and is part of the discipline of God. However much we may be at times tempted to think otherwise, it remains true that all that we see around us expresses the bountiful goodness of God.

3. 'Thou *crownest* the year.' Here we have the idea of culmination. God always works

[1] J. Drinkwater, *Poems of Men and Hours*, 24.

on an ascending scale. Evolution has shown us that.

A fire-mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian,
And caves where the cave-men dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty,
And a face turned from the clod—
Some call it Evolution,
And others call it God.

A haze on the far horizon,
The infinite, tender sky,
The ripe, rich tint of the cornfields,
And the wild geese sailing high;
And all over upland and lowland
The charm of the golden rod—
Some of us call it Autumn,
And others call it God.

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach,
When the moon is new and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in:
Come from the mystic ocean,
Whose rim no foot has trod—
Some of us call it Longing,
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions who, humble and nameless,
The straight, hard pathway plod—
Some call it Consecration,
And others call it God.

The harvest is the crown of the year. If experience had not by this time accustomed us to it, who would ever have anticipated such an end from such a beginning? Is there any likeness of such a crown in the seed the farmer flings into the soil? Is there any suggestion of an oak in an acorn? These questions that Nature puts to us should make us patient and thoughtful in the higher experiences of life. Who would ever imagine that there are poems in an alphabet? Who would ever dream that that pink, dimpled, crowing infant may one day be a philosopher, a scientist, a missionary, a leader of men? God crowns the world of men as well as the world of Nature. Human life and character and experience have their supreme culminating moments. Love comes to crown the solitary life. Success comes to crown legitimate ambition—not forgetting that there may be a true success in honourable failure. Influence comes to crown character. Friendship comes to crown the longings of the heart. Trust and admiration come to crown the life lived in honest toil.

¶ Tennyson was in his eighty-first year when he wrote 'Crossing the Bar.' On showing the poem to his son, the latter exclaimed, 'That is the crown of your life's work!' 'It came in a moment,' was the aged poet's reply. Yet, however instantaneous was the inspiration, the hymn had behind it a lifetime of careful, painstaking, even fastidious work.

The culmination is a process: the crown is sometimes deferred. It is deferred in Nature, yet experience has taught us to expect it, though it looks as if nothing were being done during the dreary, sterile months of winter. The earth seems to be dead, and God appears to have withdrawn. Yet if our hearing were acute enough, we might lay our ear to the ground in December and hear the pulse still beating in that mighty bosom, and the sap still running in the veins of trees, and by and by we shall behold again the riotous life of spring. We must not allow our hearts to despond when there is a winter season in our spiritual experience,—dull wintry seasons when death seems to reign, periods of apathy in which the bird of hope is silent and the sun of enthusiasm obscured. In these higher regions the crown is often long withheld. Yet we need not be discouraged, for the seed is potent to work wonders, and the Divine Husbandman is truly with us. 'In due season we shall reap if we faint not.'

Foreign Missions

Ps. lxvii. 1, 2.—'God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.'

It is most probable that this Psalm was written after the Exile, when the Temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt—in a time of national rapture. Many new poems were written then and sung in the Temple services, and the Sixty-seventh

might be called the blessing—the parting hymn—as it is an expansion of the ancient blessing which Aaron is said to have been instructed to give to the assembled tribes in the wilderness when they were dismissed to their tents. We hear its repetition in the first words of the Sixty-seventh Psalm: 'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee.' So the Psalmist took the old phrase and developed it to fit into the new circumstances. And this Psalm is just as much at home in the Church of Christ in this twentieth century after our Lord's coming as it was in the Jewish Temple centuries before Christ came. The universal character of the Psalm may be judged from the uses to which it is put. The *Deus misereatur* is never out of place. It is proper alike to the Church, the nation, and the world, as a thanksgiving and harvest song, or as a theme for Foreign Missions. And it has thus been widely used in the Christian Church worship for centuries.

1. Let us look at the Psalm in its relation to Foreign Missions.

(1) We first remark the scope and sweep of its petitions, which furnish us with an admirable pattern for our own prayers. 'God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us.' That shows how the Psalmist's first thought is for his own people; but that is not where the Psalm ends. In the very next breath the sky lifts, the horizon recedes; the national note gives way to the universal need. The Psalmist's sympathies run out to the countries beyond. He has hardly emancipated himself from Jewish exclusiveness than he overleaps all national boundaries and brings the wide world before God in prayer. He anticipated Christ's passion for those other sheep which are not of the Jewish fold. Living centuries before the Apostle Paul, he shared all Paul's passion to proclaim the truth to those who had not heard. The Psalm, which begins with the prayer, 'God be merciful unto us, and bless us,' ends with a vision of a redeemed world—'all the ends of the earth shall fear him.'

¶ Arthur Jackson, at the early age of twenty-six, died a martyr to the plague at Mukden in Manchuria while devotedly tending a plague-stricken people, commending alike Christian love and British humanity, and winning for himself the admiration and gratitude of the people for whom he gave his life. Of him the Viceroy, Hsi Liang, wrote: 'His heart was in the saving of the world.'[1]

Truth has always this world-wide universal note. The perfect road begins where our own ends. We must enlarge the scope of our petitions until we bring the wide world before God. The man who in his prayers never gets beyond 'God be merciful unto me' has not learnt the elements of Christianity. He has not learned the mind of Christ. And, if we had entered into the Spirit of Christ, our prayers would have some splendid and daring universalities that would overleap the boundaries, that would sweep over continents and oceans, that would not cease in their flight until we had brought the ends of the world before God in prayer. The truest service of the Kingdom is created by unselfish prayer. It is like the boring of an artesian well, which suddenly reaches the rushing spring. So prayer alone can penetrate to that devotion and sacrifice latent in the human heart by which triumphs of the Kingdom of God may be achieved.

¶ Dr Robert E. Speer, in his pamphlet on *Prayer and Missions*, says: 'The evangelization of the world in this generation depends first of all upon a revival of prayer. Deeper than the need for men; deeper far than the need for money; aye, deep down at the bottom of our spiritless life is the need for the forgotten secret of prevailing world-wide prayer.'

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy Presence will prevail to make!
We kneel, how weak! we rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
And others, that we are not always strong?

(2) 'God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us.' For what? 'That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.' The Psalmist asks the blessing that it may serve the universal good. He had grasped the elementary truth that God's blessings are not given to men for selfish ends, but that they may share and distribute them. Christ appointed His twelve disciples, first that they might be with Him, and then that He might send them forth to

[1] F. J. Chavasse, in *The Record*, August 2, 1912.

preach. They were to accompany Him on His journeys and to enjoy His close and intimate friendship. But the blessing was conferred, not for selfish enjoyment, but for service and use. It was meant for the enriching of the whole world. They were admitted into Christ's close intimacy and given special opportunities for knowing Him in order that they might make Him known to other people; redeemed that they might become preachers of redemption. The Apostle Paul was called to be an apostle, and it was a great thing to be so called; but he was called—to what? To a life of ease, and quietness, and happy enjoyment? No. Called in order that he might be sent to preach to the barbarians of Iconium, to the idolaters of Ephesus, to the philosophers of Athens, to the legionaries of Rome, to be scourged, imprisoned, and to die without the gate. Called to preach the gospel of Christ to others, which illustrates the law of this love. We are never enriched for our own selfish enjoyment, but in order that others may be blessed. The manifold religious privileges conferred upon this land of ours have not been conferred for England's sake only, but that through her they might become the joy and privilege of the whole world. God has blessed us for the benefit of the world. That is an elementary truth; but have we acted upon it? Have we, like some stagnant pool, tried to keep all that we have received; or are we like the stream which is for ever going on its way? It hurries down into the valley, by the village, through the town, and on and on, so long as there is a single yard of land to be enriched and blessed; and then on till the sea is reached and its work is done; and wherever it goes it gives life.

When all was waste and fear
  And savage cruelty
Within these islands dear,
  Came o'er the misty sea
Great hearts who loved the Christ and then
Loved for His sake their fellow-men.

To-day, because they came,
  The beast of strife lies dead,
The cruel Druid flame,
  The rites of blood, are fled,
And kindly Home with shelter warm
Glows for the wanderer through the storm.

Although the heart of man
  Be hard and evil still,
And in our land doth plan
  And nourish many an ill,
All that is ours of good and fair
They gave who brought the Gospel there.

And Honour bids requite
  Their chivalry in kind,
Send forth the gladdening Light
  Where darkened man gropes blind,
That all the world may share our Peace
And Love the Saviour's reign increase.[1]

2. The Psalmist describes the salvation that Israel was to give to the world as God's 'way' and as God's 'saving health.'

(1) *God's 'way.'*—The Psalmist harks back to a figure that is familiar to all Old Testament readers—travelling as from the city of destruction. The traveller's goal is happiness and satisfaction and peace; and there is a certain way along which he must walk if life is to be happy and peaceful in its course, and triumphant in its ending. As we look abroad over the world, we see men and women out of the way—turning every one to his own way, and reaping misery and unrest as the result. It was the horror of sin and idol-worship that struck our fathers; but it is not so much the horror of sin as the pity and pathos of it that appeals to us. Every idol and temple is evidence of man's desire to know the way. And yet every idol and temple in the world is also proof of the tragic fact that men have missed it. They have lost their way morally and spiritually—souls in the dark, and people missing the end of life—and we have the knowledge that can put them right again. We are responsible in having this knowledge. Are we not anxious, then, to tell the people who have missed their way in the dark and to help them back again? These are the very people who are so near to the heart of Christ. 'The son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost'—the people who had missed their way.

There is darkness still, gross darkness, Lord,
On this fair earth of Thine.
There are prisoners still in the prison-house,
Where never a light doth shine.

[1] W. H. Hamilton.

There are doors still bolted against Thee,
There are faces set like a wall;
And over them all the Shadow of Death
Hangs like a pall.
Do you hear the voices calling,
Out there in the black of the night?
Do you hear the sobs of the women,
Who are barred from the blessed light?
And the children,—the little children,—
Do you hear their pitiful cry?
O brothers, we must seek them,
Or there in the dark they die![1]

(2) *God's 'saving health.'*—'That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.' If the previous figure of 'the way' suggests a wandering world, this suggests a sick world. And health is really wholeness. It is not a little significant that the word in the New Testament used for salvation is *soteria*, 'soundness,' 'completeness, 'wholeness.' Salvation comes, even in its highest connotation, from this sense of filling up something that was lacking. And Christ's teaching is in line. 'Wilt thou be made whole?' was His question to the impotent man. 'If I but touch him I shall be made *whole*' was the conviction of one who saw Him. 'As many as touched him were made *perfectly whole*' is the record of work done by Him. But it was not bodily sickness alone that our Lord cured; He healed the 'broken in heart,' the sick soul, the whole personality. Christ still goes about the world healing men's bodies. Next to the mission station you often find the hospital. But Christ gives something which no doctor can supply—healing of the soul. You may, perhaps, by the advance of civilization, relieve the physical ills under which so many millions of our fellow-creatures live. You can by education free the minds of people from the shackles of superstition in which they have been held for centuries; but Jesus Christ is the only Person who can deal with man's secret spirit. He alone can deal with the sick soul, and the world is full of souls hurt by sin. People are saying in these days that we ought to ignore sin and the devil; but they cannot be ignored. As Professor James says, 'There they are, and they constitute the most terrible and tragic facts of life.' Who can deal with them? That is something that is beyond the reach of human skill, but the Great Physician binds up the 'broken in heart' and 'healeth all their wounds.' If we have been made whole again ought we not to pass on the news of the Good Physician? God has given us the knowledge of this 'saving health' in order that we may impart it.

[1] John Oxenham.

3. We hear a good deal of foolish talk in these days about the condition of pagan peoples. They say the work of the missionary is an unnecessary intrusion upon their innocent happiness. Were things happy in Fiji, in the New Hebrides, in the South Sea Islands? Are things happy to-day in New Guinea, or Central Africa? 'The dark places of the earth are full of cruelty.' The world waits for its happiness until it finds Christ.

¶ I suppose I am in the position of many other persons. I had conceived a great prejudice against Missions in the South Seas. And I had no sooner come there than that prejudice was first reduced and then annihilated. Those who deblaterate against Missions have only one thing to do—to come and see them on the spot.[1]

We hear also to-day much talk of co-operation, and this is wisdom. The call of the day is for co-operation with God in the things of the Kingdom of Heaven; co-operation and consecration of the whole man, spiritual, mental, and physical, to the furthering of these things, the advancement of God's greatest glory, and man's greatest good. As John Oxenham so well expresses it:

O then shall come the golden day
To which true hearts are pressing,
When earth's discordant strains shall blend
The one true God confessing.
When Christly thought and Christly deed
Shall bind each earth and nation
In one grand brotherhood of men
And one high Consecration.

Saving Health

Ps. lxvii. 2.—'That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.'

Our Lord purposes for each of His children perfect health. He would have every power and faculty of our being in a vigorous condition. Our health is our only safety. To be in any

[1] R. L. Stevenson.

way sickly or weak is to offer hospitality to the Evil One, who seeks out our weak points, and at the undefended place makes his entrance. Fullness of health is fullness of resistance. The healthy soul by its very vigour is fortified against the invasions of evil and night. 'And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost . . . was led into the wilderness . . . being forty days tempted.' Let us carefully mark our Lord's condition when the temptation began. He was 'full of the Holy Ghost'; every part of His being was spiritually healthy. His condition afforded no opportunity for the tempter; the devil could obtain no foothold. Every seed requires a lodgment before it can sprout and mature, and these seeds of flying evil suggestion seek a congenial ground for nutriment and growth. But the Lord was so 'filled with the Spirit' that the requisite growing-bed could not be found; the evil suggestions died even as they fell. He was saved by His health.

1. *Spiritual health is self-protective.*—Indifferent spiritual health is exposed to incessant peril. The city of Corinth abounded in evil. Epidemics of worldliness and vice pervaded every grade of social life. The Christian needed to be in perfect health if he were not to be smitten by the evil contagion. Men of weakly wills and indifferent consciences and lukewarm affections fell before the invader, and became the victims of the prevalent vanity or lust. And you will remember that the Apostle Paul, looking at the little Corinthian Church, was filled with anxiety concerning some of its members. 'Some are sickly!' He felt that their sickliness was a friendly condition to the worldliness that besieged the gates of the Church; their weakness exposed them to its attacks. We know how it is in the material sphere. When men are run down they are more susceptible to any contagion that may prowl about the streets. Influenza lowers a man's vitality, reduces his powers of resistance, and leaves the gates of his life ajar for more serious disease. And it is in the reduced vitality of the Christian life that the Evil One finds his entrance and begins his more disastrous work. He makes friends of our sickliness, and through our permitted weaknesses he accomplishes our death. Now the Lord purposes that we should be in perfect health. He longs to destroy this easy susceptibility to sin, and to place the whole bias of our life in the direction of holiness, when our very health will be our resistance to the encroachments of the devil.

¶ Ruskin, in his *Ethics of the Dust*, points out that crystals have two qualities which go to make up their value. One is their shape, and the other is their purity. The shape is determined by the crystal's surroundings, the quick or slow process of cooling, or outward pressure. 'But,' he says, 'it seems as if it had in itself the power of rejecting impurity if it has crystalline life enough. Here is a crystal of quartz, well enough shaped in its way, but it seems to have been languid and sick at heart; and some milky substance has got into it, and mixed itself up with it, all through. It makes the quartz quite yellow, if you hold it up to the light, and milky blue on the surface. Here is another, broken out of all traceable shape, but as pure as a mountain spring. I like this one best.'[1]

2. *Spiritual health is contagious.*—Common thought and common speech have made us familiar with the contagion of vice. We ought to be equally familiar with the idea of the contagion of virtue. An evil effluence proceeds from the life of the wicked; an invigorating and purifying effluence proceeds from the life of the good. 'Out of him shall flow rivers of living water.' We impress and influence one another not only by what we say and what we do, but even more deeply still by what we are. Mr Yeats has recorded his belief in the impressive power which one strong imagination can exert upon another. Two men may be in the same room, and the intense and concentrated imagination of the one may convey itself to the mind of the other—minds can interflow. This accounts for those strange mental coincidences which are so frequently revealed in the intercourse of men with men. One man mentions a topic, and the other at once declares that the same subject was at that moment passing through his own mind. Without even the ministry of speech or of action we can mightily influence one another. We, therefore, never know just where great movements are born. We mention the Reformation and think of Luther, but it may be that the spiritual health of some obscure soul was the vitalizing origin of that great revival, in whose

[1] C. Myers, *Making a Life*, 121.

wealth of benediction we live to-day. Our presence itself is vitalizing if we are possessed by vigorous moral and spiritual health. In the home, in the workshop, in society, in the place of worship, our presence counts for much, and 'virtue' is going out of us in all the many relationships of our varied life.

¶ Looking back on his days at Rugby one of Dr Arnold's boys paid this tribute to him: 'His very presence,' he said, 'seemed to create a new spring of health and vigour within us, and to give to life an interest and an elevation which remained with us long after we had left him. Indeed, he dwelt so continually in our thoughts, as a living and commanding influence, that, even when death had taken him from us, the bond appeared to be still unbroken, and the sense of separation was almost lost in the still deeper sense of a life and a union indestructible.'

3. *Spiritual health is actively aggressive.*—'Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him.' The good exercise a repressive influence over the vices and passions of men. We help to provide atmospheres for one another; we can provide an atmosphere which will inflame the passions of our brother, or we can provide an atmosphere which will help him to subdue them. Everybody knows that we can create conditions that incite another man's temper and lust, and we can create conditions by which these fires and cravings can be suppressed and destroyed. Our medical men sometimes provide medicated atmospheres to help to heal the ailments of their patients. They can soften and moisten the air, and so give comfort to the struggling and help to regain them to health. The Christian supplies a medicated atmosphere to his brother; his very presence helps in the creation of conditions which are unfavourable to vice and friendly to virtue. There is nothing more encouraging than just this persuasion. It is an uplifting thought that the very presence of a Christian man takes sides with all heavenly forces, ministers to the good in our fellow-men and helps to destroy the bad.

¶ 'How was it that your Church tolerated Drummond?' asked John Morley of a Scots minister who was his guest. 'Were his views not a bit advanced?' 'Well, you see,' was the reply, 'we never took him seriously as a thinker. We regarded him rather as a religious influence.' 'How did he show that?' asked Morley. 'For one thing,' answered the minister, 'he cleansed Edinburgh University life for several years.' 'Ah!' remarked Morley thoughtfully, 'that's better than being a thinker.' [1]

As for the secret of this 'saving health,' it is to be found in the first verse of this Psalm. The Psalmist is a suppliant; he is kneeling in the presence chamber of the King. 'God be merciful unto us, and bless us.' He is pleading with the good Lord to stoop in pity, and to lay upon him the forgiving and liberating hand. 'Cause thy face to shine upon us.' But that means that the suppliant's face is turned towards the face of the Maker. We are renewed into the same image; our countenances catch the light and life that we contemplate. He is the 'health of my countenance.' If we are to be healthy we must keep in ceaseless communion with the energies of God. 'I will restore health unto thee'—the restoration is as constant as the waste. We shall be constantly giving, and yet remain always full.

The Soul and Solitude

Ps. lxviii. 6.—'God setteth the solitary in families.'

1. Most of us know what it is to feel solitary, to feel that there is no one to sympathize with us or to understand us. We feel it most of all when we are strangers, or nearly strangers, in some great city. We have been brought up, perhaps, in a village or little town, in the sort of place where everybody is known. And then we come to the city and understand what is meant by solitude amidst crowds; some great city where it is almost a point of honour hardly to know the name of the people who live next door, where crowds are for ever moving about and nobody seems to care in the least how we behave or what we do. That is to feel solitary.

¶ When that great scholar, A. B. Davidson, came, a poor student lad, shrinking and shy and sensitive, to Aberdeen, at first lonely and homesick, he used to steal out of his bare room and roam about the unknown streets, would sometimes stand and look in hungrily into a lighted room where some family were gathered, and envy them for all that happy homeliness they took for granted. And then some one would pull down the blind. And, shut out, he would

[1] N. M. Caie, *The Secret of a Warm Heart*, 32.

slip away, with the night surely even blacker, colder, lonelier than it was before.[1]

What we desire in our new life is company, fellowship. We have left behind the fellowship of our homes. We have come to a strange place because we want a new and different companionship, one more or less of our own choosing. This sort of desire for companionship, but a companionship in which we can exercise choice—for fellowship, but yet fellowship in which we are ourselves—represents a real striving after what is best in our human nature. Just think of it. As we look back at earliest history and watch the great tribes and races of men streaming like clouds over the horizon, they move in masses, as tribes, as races, as families, and the sense of being an individual—the want to be myself—has not yet appeared. The savage, the half-trained man, has no desire for an action outside his own tribe or his own family. He has no sense of the possibility of separating himself or asserting himself, and as we look we find that still surviving nearer ourselves. If we go to India what do we see? We may make acquaintance with some young man at the University. He has all the modern phrases upon his lips; he talks all the Christian language; and one might suppose that he is going to become a Christian in about a week. But behind this young man there is his family—one of those great joint Indian families where they live together, grandparents, parents, children, all a great family circle out of which the person has grown and into which he returns. The idea of taking independent action, of asserting his own convictions and acting upon them because he is an individual—that does not come within the scope of what seems possible to him.

If we look at the Old Testament, what do we find there? In the main we find the record of a state of things like this: God deals with men in masses, in the race, in the chosen people. He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. There seems no sense of the development of distinct individuality. But we look again, and what is the speciality of the Old Testament? What makes the growth there? What is there that points on to Christ? It is that there we see what it is to be an individual man, to be one's self. It is growing out of the sense of the relationship to God. Think of Abraham, that heroic single soul, conscious of a call of God, and therefore going out from his parents and his kindred into a strange land, where he knew not any one or anything, but following because he was a soul which knew the call of God. And in the Psalms what do we see but the fresh joy of the soul as it knows that God is its own God? 'Thou art *my* God.' We see the penitence of the soul as it abases itself in the consciousness of its own sin: 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.' There is the rapture of the soul as it rises up again in the sense of being forgiven: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin.' It is the soul in its depression and the soul in its joy, alone, before its God.

And so the Old Testament passes out into that New Testament in which there is disclosed in all its majesty the vision of what the human soul can be in the glorious liberty of the children of God. We have nothing in human records so soul-stirring as the character of the Virgin Mary. With no other training than that heroic training in the oracles of the Old Testament, we see her grown to such simplicity of stature in the presence of her God that she can rise to the height of her great vocation, and utter those words of royal-hearted dignity and strength which live for evermore as among the most majestic utterances of human individuality—the words of the *Magnificat*. There we see what religion can do to make a single human soul not out of any glory of wealth or any speciality of education, but out of that which lies simply and singly in the relation of the human soul to God. And what is the glory of that pæan—the eighth chapter of Romans? It is the consciousness of the soul of St Paul of what it is to know himself a son of God in Jesus Christ, and therefore to be independent of circumstances.

2. What are the remedies for this feeling of solitude?

(1) If we are suffering from a keen sense of solitude, that sense of being isolated, of there being no one who cares about us, there is one great primary remedy, one right way to overcome it, while there are many wrong ways; and the right way is to do this first—to 'acquaint thyself with God and be at peace with him.' Say not thou in thine heart, I shall be hidden from the Lord; I shall not be remembered from on high, for what am I among such an infinite number of creatures? That sense

[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 23.

which belonged to the writer of Ecclesiasticus belongs to us. We feel that we are lost in the multitude. It is exactly then that we need to remember that 'God is my God. God who dwells in all the universe dwells in me, by His Spirit personally, actively, consciously, so that I can speak to Him, approach Him, love Him, complain to Him, so that His providence is on my life, so that His love is about me, so that He has a purpose for me, even then most when I feel disconsolate and purposeless.'

¶ Sir James Stephen said of his friend, Zachary Macaulay, father of the historian: 'His earthward affections, active and all-enduring as they were, could yet thrive without the support of human sympathy, because they were sustained by so abiding a sense of the divine presence, and so absolute a submission to the divine will, as raised him habitually to that higher region where the reproach of man could not reach, and the praise of man might not presume to follow him.'

There is a mystery in human hearts,
And though we be encircled by a host
Of those who love us well and are beloved,
To every one of us, from time to time,
There comes a sense of utter loneliness.
Our dearest friend is 'stranger' to our joy,
And cannot realize our bitterness.
'There is not one who really understands;
Not one to enter into what I feel';
Such is the cry of each of us in turn.
We wander in a 'solitary way,'
No matter what, or where, our lot may be;
Each heart, mysterious even to itself,
Must live its inner life in solitude.

And would you know the reason why this is?
It is because the Lord desires our love.
In every heart He wishes to be first.
He therefore keeps the secret key Himself,
To open all its chambers, and to bless
With perfect sympathy and holy peace
Each solitary soul that comes to Him.

So when we feel this loneliness, it is
The voice of Jesus, saying, 'Come to Me';
And every time we are 'not understood,'
It is a call for us to come again,
For Christ alone can satisfy the soul;
And those who walk with Him from day to day
Can never have a solitary way.

(2) Out of all this comes something else. Grant this, and there rises in man's soul another sense of dignity—the dignity of work. If God really made me, if I can talk to Him, then I am here in this world to do His work; and whatever it is I have to do, though it be mechanical and trivial, it can be done well, and good workmanship is never lost. It builds up a quality in the soul. It stamps a quality upon the world outside it which will appear in the final estimate of things. Work will be valued, not by the largeness of the appearance that it has made before the imagination of men, but by the amount of will, intelligence, spirit and moral force that was put into it; always by that and by no other measure in the sight of God, and ultimately by that and by no other measure in the sight of men.

¶ The man who would ripen and perfect his soul must attend to the religious uses of his daily work—seeing the unseen in its seen—heeding it, not with a dry punctiliousness, but lovingly, recognizing its dignity, not as a mere making of money, but as an elaborate means of grace, occupying three-fourths of life.[1]

(3) And then we have about us the communion of saints. In the early Christian days, when persecution kept the Church pure, if a man was a good sort of man and wanted to live well he was drawn to the Christian Church. He counted the cost on the whole. He said, 'I would rather live that life even at the risk of my head.' And so if he was a good man he was drawn to other good men, not perfect, but still a communion of saints in the world. Those who want to be good are not fewer now than they were in the days of persecution, but they are more mixed up with other people, so that they are harder to discover. Then, we must think of the communion of departed saints—that great hierarchy of the dead, who have lived faithful in life and rest in unvisited graves. We may always have about us the sense of the glory of that great fellowship.

¶ Grant Duff, in his *Notes from a Diary*, says: 'An old priest was trudging home through the deep snow after early Mass on the morning of All Saints' Day, when a man stopped him to ask how many had been at his service. "Millions! Millions!" he replied.'

[1] Henry Drummond.

They fought as we are fighting now;
And still, in blood and flame,
To Christ the Lord they held their vow,
By Him they overcame:
And still with us they have their part;
How should we faint or fail,
Who know what fellowship of heart
Is ours beyond the veil?

Ours the communion of all saints,
The Church's faithful dead,
To cheer us when our spirit faints,
And hope and strength are fled.
But little have we sight to see,
But faint the tones we hear;
Yet drawn by light and melody
We press one step more near.

3. If we have liberated our soul by these spiritual means—by trust in God, by seeing the royalty of His service, and doing an honest piece of work, and by trying to bathe ourselves in the sense that we are in the company of all faithful people—then after a little while our solitude will be gone. We shall try, for example, to help those who are more friendless than ourselves. That brings us across people like-minded. We shall find others who also want to serve God and to do good to men. We shall find ourselves no longer solitary but blessed with the companionship of men. 'God setteth the solitary in families.' Solitude amidst a crowd is not what is meant for us. It is to drive us back to God. It is to give us that sovereignty of soul which no human fellowship —not the best and closest—can give, and then there will come to us fellowship, companionship, friendship and love. 'He setteth the solitary in families.' Only this second, not first. 'I am not alone, because the Father is with me'—that always first.

Thou know'st our bitterness: our joys are Thine,
No stranger Thou to all our wanderings wild;
Nor could we bear to think how every line
Of us, Thy darkened likeness and defiled,
Comes in full sunshine of Thy piercing eye,
But that Thou call'st us brethren. Sweet repose
Is in that word. The Lord who dwells on high
Knows all, yet loves us better than He knows.

Christ and the Family

Ps. lxviii. 6.—'God setteth the solitary in families.'

1. The Christian home is one of the best gifts of earth. That must be a self-evident fact to beings who have a faculty of distinctive judgments of value. Home is the first sphere in which the Christian is brought face to face with the responsibility which is his as a social being. In the home the unique gifts of human individuality receive their primary call to be up and doing. In the home social duty has its earliest beginning and is most concentrated and intense. One could hardly imagine a greater hurt being done to the State than the obliteration of the Christian home from our midst. So it holds that a man can scarce do a greater service to the State than to set himself to the establishment of a Christian household. And that for various reasons.

Such a household is a centre of gladness; and he that develops gladness is one of the greatest benefactors of men. There are certain homes which have a very curious effect upon a stranger. As soon as he enters them he feels inclined to be cheerful. He cannot himself precisely say why; but he observes gradually a kind of oxygen in the air, which exhilarates him, so that if he has seen life through smoke-coloured glasses before, he removes them and sees it as it is; if, indeed, he be not inclined to put rose-coloured spectacles in their place.

¶ It was my good fortune not long ago to spend a memorable hour with a man now nearing the end of his long life who was brought up in the same home as the wife of Burne-Jones, the mother of Rudyard Kipling, and the mother of our Prime Minister, and he told me how much it had meant to him all through the years that in the home of his childhood, where religion was always the central and the supreme interest, books and music and happy laughter were never far away.[1]

Such a household provides a unity to face life's testings. A common loyalty to God seems to develop a common loyalty to each other in the members of a house. A thoroughly united family is a very fine thing to see. And folk are certainly no weaker for life's battle, when they recognize that they do not stand alone, but that there are others with them to defend and to be

[1] G. Jackson, *A Parson's Log*, 59.

defended. 'God setteth the solitary in families.' He meant man to have community and unity in his life, a unity finely put by the poet—

Two hopes within one will;
Two wills beneath one overshadowing mind;
One life, one death, one immortality, one heaven.

Such a household is the best guarantee for true manhood and womanhood for the future. The State, no doubt, can do much; but it will never in this world take the place of the family. The ideal before us should be a state of affairs in which it will be possible for all men to form right households, if their wills are set that way. Surely we will admit that membership of a Christian home has, under God, been our chief preservative from evil. The attitude towards the Most High, towards right and wrong, towards honour and duty, and towards our fellows, that imperceptible and all-important tone formed in our early years, have been the possessions which have been our rod and staff, and will be, please God, until the end.[1]

2. 'God setteth the solitary in families.' We all start in life where God meant us to start. We begin with love in us; love receives us, love dwells about us; where the love of God is, there, indeed, ought peace to be.

The family is God's creation. By His will it is; it embodies His wisdom. But it is not a place that makes the home. Some may have been born beside the sea, and have wandered about the beach and among the sand dunes. Others may have been born in a street, dark, dismal, in a great city, where poverty set up its squalor, and only desolation seemed to reign. Wherever the boy was born, wherever the man was brought up, Nature signified less than man. As the father and mother are, so the home must be.

¶ Our home consisted of a 'but' and a 'ben,' and a midroom or chamber called the closet. . . . This closet was a small apartment, having room only for a bed, a table, and a chair. This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and 'shut to the door'; and we children got to understand, by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about), that prayers were being poured out there for us—as of old by the high priest within the veil in the most holy place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice, pleading as if for life, and we learnt to slip in and out past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born soul that was always dancing on my father's face; it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived.'[1]

We talk and sing of the fair green hills of Nazareth, and no doubt these hills were very fair. But, if we judge by the years which are preserved for us, there was one thing at Nazareth fairer still to Christ. It was the home where as a boy He played, and watched His mother tidying and baking, and heard her singing, when the day was over.

It is God that makes the world, and as God is, such is the world that He makes. Man's home is made by man; the memory that shapes is the memory that abides; and in its abiding there is testimony to its power. When Paul had to speak to Timothy, did he say, You are pre-eminently favoured in having had Gamaliel as your teacher, or Socrates as your friend? Not he. He said, 'Faith dwelleth in thee after the manner in which it dwelt in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice.'

3. The influence of home, felt by us all, was felt in its full intensity by Christ. In His words and deeds—in His life and in His death—'home sweet home' is like a sweet refrain. The first miracle He ever wrought was wrought in a home and at a marriage feast. The most beautiful parable He ever uttered was about a son who was a prodigal. The richest and deepest name He had for God was drawn from the tender relationships of home—'Our *Father* which art in heaven.' This Man spake as never man spake. We speak of tendencies and of environment. He spoke of little children in the market-place, of a woman sweeping out a cottage, and of another baking in the kitchen, and of a father who was broken-hearted as he thought of a prodigal son in a far country. Somehow or other, then, right through the life of Jesus you feel the power and influence of home. It colours His language. It inspires His miracles. It kindles His passion and directs

[1] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 261.

[1] John G. Paton.

His vision. Even amid the agonies of Calvary and in the hour of excruciating pain the old familiar music is not silent. There are men and women whom we sometimes meet who irresistibly suggest to us that their home was beautiful, and we recognize that touch in Christ. We talk of the silent years at Nazareth. They are silent only because we make them so. There is music enough and to spare waiting to fill them out of the oratorio that follows. The Evangelists were too wise to go to Nazareth to interrogate some patriarchal villager; they said, Do you want to know about Christ's home? Study His ministry and find it there. What could the gossips in Nazareth have known?—the best and most beautiful homes have no history. It is when homes are unhappy and when parents quarrel that the neighbours are able to satisfy the chronicler.

4. There are no homes without responsibilities, duties, and trials, and these were to be found in the home in Nazareth too. It is commonly held that Joseph died while our Lord was still in boyhood, and so Jesus had the burden of the home. The last time that we hear of Joseph is when they went up to Jerusalem together; after that we always hear of Mary. Just when the crisis of the child had come, just when He heard the calling of the world, He had to go home again, and take up the burden, and support the household as a carpenter. 'Wist ye not I must be about my father's business?' tells us what was surging in His heart. He had been dreaming of kingdoms in these quiet days, or the devil would never have tempted Him with kingdoms. Then Joseph died, and Mary was a widow, and the younger children must have bread to eat—and the Lord became the Carpenter of Nazareth. And no one in all that sleepy hollow knew what dreams and hopes were burning in His heart; but the devil knew when he tempted Him with kingdoms. These so-called silent years were filled with the heroism of quiet duty.[1]

How great an enterprise the formation of a Christian household is. It requires such powers of continuance and of faith that it is not wonderful that men often fail in their ideals. But the greatness of the enterprise must not make us afraid of it. Rather it should inspire us to see what great things can be done in common lives, when dominated by the Christian motive.

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Wind on the Heath*, 151.

THE MARCH OF GOD

Ps. lxviii. 7.—'O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah.'

The Sixty-eighth Psalm is the Marseillaise of the Old Testament. All through it there resounds the measured tread of the hosts of God. In its superb sweep and rush it gives a wonderful picture of an irresistible and victorious advance. God arises and His enemies are scattered, driven before Him like smoke. Crash upon crash of thunder, till the mountains reel, and kings of armies flee apace. Forward goes the Conqueror, riding upon the heaven of heavens with His myriads of chariots, while all the world rings with His praise.

'Forward' has ever been the watchword of humanity. However dimly felt, there is in every man a secret urge towards better things. He cannot rest, he must be up and out on the road. His soul is thrilled by the thought of the onward march. Whither bound he scarce can tell, but he has a vision before his eyes that lures him on. Dim and confused it is, but none the less alluring. The road may be long and difficult, but somewhere on in front there is victory and rest. Wherefore, march!

In our time the vision has taken on a new and more impressive form. The whole universe is now conceived as the scene of a tremendous forward movement. Progress is seen to be the law of all life, and not of human history only. Up through all the stages of being, from the lowest to the highest, the advance is made. The amazing record of the past inspires hope of greater things to come, for it surely cannot be that all the travail of the ages is in vain. The modern mind is obsessed by the idea of evolution, but there is much confused thinking as to its meaning, its direction and the end towards

which it moves. On these subjects we shall find that this ancient prophetic Psalm has much that is of consequence to teach us.

I

God on the March

First of all this, that it is God whom we see on the march. Israel's journey through the wilderness is typical. It was a progress from bondage, through toil and trial, to liberty and a fuller life. And it was accomplished under Divine leadership. God Himself led the march. Every morning when the ark set forward Moses said, 'Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered.' Every evening when it rested he said, 'Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel' (Num. x. 35). So when men in after times looked back on that heroic age, as does the writer of this Psalm, it was not the march of Israel that they saw so much as the march of God. Jehovah was there in all His majesty leading on through the sea and the wilderness to the promised land. Here was the dominant factor; here was the key to the whole splendid enigma. His presence and His alone made the advance possible, and sufficiently accounted for the signs and wonders which accompanied it.

This is a conviction that is rooted in every religious mind. It is not to be accounted for by saying that the men of the East are obsessed by the idea of God, that they ignore secondary causes and attribute all without discrimination to the one great First Cause. That may be so, but Western minds also have felt, as the supremely significant fact, that God has a cause which He is steadily advancing to ultimate victory. And so they could range themselves under the Divine banner and throw all their energies into the struggle in the assurance, 'the battle is not yours but God's.' '*In hoc vince*' was the heavenly sign that led the first Christian emperor to victory, and men of faith in all ages have looked to that same heavenly sign for guidance and inspiration in the onward march. The religious mind has no objection to the doctrine of evolution, but quite the contrary—so long as it is recognized for what it really is, the onward march of God.

But here is where much of our modern thinking goes astray. God is left out of account. No reckoning is made with His presence and working. Evolution is conceived as operating by mechanical law. The whole process is pictured as the movement of a vast machine, soulless, inevitable and irresistible. Human progress, also, comes to be regarded similarly. Ardent souls become intoxicated by the thought of humanity on the march, but many think and speak of it in terms of mass movement and environment merely. By the perfecting of machinery, by the progressive subduing of the earth and the harnessing of natural forces to the service of man, the great end will be attained. This view of things has, in recent years, reached its climax in that delirium which the world knows as Bolshevism. A people long oppressed suddenly burst out of the house of bondage and proclaimed the sovereignty, nay the divinity, of collective man. Him they picture as a colossus, with obscure and featureless face, striding over cities and palaces, and trampling down his enemies. In his temples—for they have built temples for his worship—figures of saints and angels are replaced by models of machinery with wheels that whirl at a touch from the altar. For man must be taught to depend wholly on machinery for his salvation. Listen to the dreadful battle-song of this new faith.

Up! up! ye people, avengers of the world's suffering!
Wake up! arise! Strike dead; strike dead!
Strike them all dead, the malefactors,
All those who have stolen our bread!
Ye workers, now smash to pulp
With your fists that phantom, God!
You are master of the fate of the world!
Ye workers, you are free, free!!!
The end is come, you rulers, the end is come!
Arise, ye people, triumph!
Onwards! Triumph! March, march!
Onwards! And—Shot on shot![1]

Who can fail to see there the perversion of terrific power? It is as if some mighty engine had suddenly leaped the rails and gone crashing down the street. Western civilization looks on aghast, but if she has discernment she will behold in that wild Bacchantic faith, as in a mirror, some lineaments of her own face. For we all, in our vaunted progress have been too ready to forget God, and to worship the works

[1] Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, 156.

of our own hands. Well, here is the awful object-lesson. If humanity goes on the march without God it can only advance towards this dreadful end. All progress is not of God. St John reminds us that 'anyone who is "advanced" and will not remain by the doctrine of Christ, does not possess God' (2 John ix., Moffatt). The sole idea in many minds is to 'advance with the times,' but the great thing is to make sure that we are advancing with God. For God is on the march through this great and terrible wilderness; He has marked out His path amid all its confusions and obscurities, and along that path He will advance resistlessly to its glorious issue.

II

Judgment and Mercy

The Psalmist goes on to describe the accompaniments of the Divine march. They are judgment and mercy. The image used is that of a violent thunderstorm sweeping across the desert. Few sights are so awesome as the dark sullen cloud creeping up from the far horizon, with sudden flashes of fire and deep menacing growls that rise in fearful crescendo to a deafening crash. Sir George Adam Smith remarks that this is 'the only process of nature upon which the desert poets of Arabia dwell with any detail.'[1] Nothing is better fitted to suggest a Divine visitation—God Himself on the march with all His hosts. Accordingly, frequent use is made of the image in the Old Testament, as in the song of Deborah (Judg. v. 4) and in the vision of Habakkuk (iii. 3). Now the Psalmist, as he faced the storm and passed under the cloud, looked up fearlessly and saw in it two diverse elements, the dreadful thunder and the blessed rain. From each of these he learnt something of the ways of God.

1. The thunder spoke of judgment. 'The earth shook, even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.' The thunder of God's judgments reverberates down through all the ages. Not once but often is it on record that God shook the earth. The annals of Israel tell of Egypt's night and of the downfall of Sennacherib. But all the vast wreckage of fallen empires tells the same tale. 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: until he come whose right it is' (Ezek. xxi. 27). So says the prophet, speaking for God, and history amply confirms his word. We cannot but feel that there is something ruthless in God's ways with men. Longsuffering is He, and infinitely patient in His working, but there comes a time when the path must be cleared for His advance, and then kingdoms are swept away like chaff. 'Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust,' cried Isaiah as he foresaw the dreadful approach of God in judgment. 'For the day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up . . . and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day' (Isa. ii. 10-17). The vision carries a menace not merely to all kingdoms based on the sword and doomed to fall by the sword, but also to all attempts at building a social order not founded on the will of God. 'Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down' (Mark xiii. 2). The doom pronounced by our Lord upon the Herod-built temple may with assurance be spoken of every unblessed edifice, scheme, or institution. All that is not of God must go down, broken with a rod of iron, dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. This is an element in revelation that must by no means be obscured or minimized. Individuals and societies need to be warned that in pursuing an irreligious course they are playing with heaven's thunder and drawing down God's lightning on their heads.

2. But with the thunder comes the blessed rain. The storm passes, the air is cleared, and the pastures of the wilderness are refreshed. So the Psalmist had seen, and wondered at the marvel of it. The cloud that advanced so threateningly had broken in blessing. The aftermath of the storm was not destruction but the upspringing of fresher, richer life. Even so are streams of mercy mingled with judgment in God's dealings with men.

In the Book of Revelation there is an impressive moment of pause when the four angels, standing at the four corners of the earth and ready to let loose the four winds, are bidden stay till the servants of God are sealed in their

[1] *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 150.

foreheads (Rev. vii. 3). Then the storms may rage but they are safe. St Peter points out how God is able to discriminate in His visitations, saving just Lot while the sinners of Sodom were overthrown (2 Pet. ii. 9). This is a notable fact, which is amply verified in religious experience. Amid the darkness and the storm God turns towards His people a face of mercy. When the destroying angel was abroad in Egypt, Israel found shelter under the sprinkled blood. In the dark night by the Red Sea the pillar of cloud and fire which embodied the Divine presence was interposed between them and the enemy, so that while it gave light to the camp of Israel it shrouded the Egyptians in gloom. Which things may be read as an allegory.

In Scottish Church history there is a period known as 'the Blink.' It marks a brief respite from persecution which occurred in the days of the Covenanters. God's heritage was very weary and in His mercy He sent a refreshing shower. So the Psalmist would have phrased it who lived in a dry and sun-baked land, but in Scotland they called it a blink of sunshine in a dark and stormy time. Many such episodes are on record, and they do much to account for the wonderful preservation of the Church throughout the ages. There was a blink given to the apostolic Church after the conversion of St Paul, when 'the churches had rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied' (Acts ix. 31). In the days of the Reformation the very Turks, as Froude the historian says, became 'the guardian angels of the infant Gospel.' So in the mercy of God the Church, though often persecuted, could never be suppressed. Often, too, has she passed through parched places in the wilderness where the springs of spiritual life were almost dried up, but ever there have come times of refreshing and revival from on high. What a parched wilderness was eighteenth-century England when John Wesley was sent, and how spiritually barren the days of Moderatism in Scotland till the evangelical revival. At such times God visited His people, coming down 'like rain upon the mown grass and as showers that water the earth.' In such wise He has continually sustained them through the wilderness and led them on from strength to strength.

III

Victory through the Word

Another great conviction of the Psalmist is that victory comes through the word of God. 'The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace.' The word here spoken of is probably the shattering decree of doom that overwhelms the enemy in a moment. 'One mighty word is hurled from heaven, like a thunder-clap, and the enemies' ranks are broken in panic. Israel does not need to fight. God speaks, and the next sound we hear is the clash of timbrels and the clear notes of the maidens chanting victory.'[1] It may be, however, that the Psalmist saw something deeper and more divine, namely a victory won by conciliation. That is the only victory worth winning, the only victory worthy of God. The idea is not alien from the Old Testament that God shall win His victory, not by the violent overthrow of His enemies, but by subduing the nations to His obedience. There are glowing visions of the Gentiles coming to worship Jehovah, bringing their gifts, and freely consecrating themselves to His service. It may be, therefore, that the Psalmist has this also in view, that he looked for victory to come not through an overwhelming display of force, but by the proclamation of the healing, life-giving word. His hope may have been that God's way would be known on earth and His saving health to all people. And thus the victory would be won.

Be that as it may, we know that this is what has come to light in the New Testament. When the word is uttered and becomes incarnate in Christ it is not a shattering, destructive word, but a healing and life-giving word. Doubtless the power to break and overthrow His enemies still is His. For one of the last visions in the Apocalypse shows Him whose name is the Word of God, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood. 'And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God' (Rev. xix. 15). The Divine victory must be won, and if there are those who madly and defiantly resist, they must in the end suffer a grievous overthrow.

[1] A. Maclaren, *The Book of Psalms*, ii. 277.

But the word is essentially a gracious and reconciling word. It is an offer of mercy, a word of peace. It carries no menace, but is loving and conciliatory. It is full of tender pleadings and invitations. It proclaims pardon to all rebels, and an assurance of welcome to all who renounce their enmity. It declares that the love of God is unquenched and unquenchable by all the sins of men, that it can stand any strain, that sinners may reject and mock and scourge and crucify but there is forgiveness for it all, that God is still waiting to be gracious. It is by the persuasiveness and persistence of this word that opposition is borne down, evil overcome by good, hatred quenched by love, and victory won by the Cross.

This is the only victory that is satisfying and complete. Men were wont to speak hopefully of 'a war to end war,' but we see now it was a vain imagination. For war can only leave an aftermath of bitterness and hate; it leaves the vanquished thirsting for revenge, it infallibly sows the seeds of future wars. You do not really conquer the adversary when you beat him down by force. So long as his will is unsubdued he is still an enemy, and there is no true peace. Only when the spirit of hostility is quenched, only when means are found to make the enemy a friend, is the perfect victory won. And such is the victory that God wins through the Word. It carries such a convincing declaration of love and mercy that hatred and unbelief are put to shame, hard and stony hearts are broken, and springs of gratitude and penitence burst forth. This is what St Paul means when he speaks of Christ 'having abolished in his flesh the enmity,' and again as 'having slain the enmity' by His cross (Eph. ii. 15, 16). The Psalmist had a vision of the Lord ascending up on high, leading captivity captive. Now we know that every one is a willing captive. Herein lies the glory of His victory, that He has conquered by love and reigns over a reconciled and loyal people.

All this surely indicates that the true and hopeful line of advance is to receive and publish abroad the word of God. Force can never lead to a new and better world. Changes of environment are after all only superficial. We must get the Word, that is, Christ, into men's hearts as a living principle, for 'man doth not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Wherever that word is received and obeyed by any single soul, there you have a real advance, the world is one step nearer to the new heavens and the new earth.

J. H. Morrison.

The Ascension of Christ

Ps. lxviii. 18.—'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led thy captivity captive: thou hast received gifts among men, yea, among the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell with them' (R.V.).

The translation of this verse in the Authorized Version has been influenced by the use made of the passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 8), where it is definitely applied to the Ascension of Christ; for the translators of the Authorized Version were very much under the dominion of theories of prophetic fulfilment. The mysterious premonition of the Ascension is somewhat dissipated by a more accurate translation of the Hebrew. If we follow the suggestion the critics make as to the original reference of this Psalm, we must understand it as a description of how the ark of Jehovah was brought over the mountains of Judæa in triumphal procession and was at length lodged in the Temple on Mount Zion, the procession including prisoners taken captive from subjugated nations and bearing gifts from the powers which had rebelled against Israel. Now it is perfectly possible that this was the original circumstance which inspired the poet, but he has only taken this as a starting-point for singing of something far more wonderful. As a description of any actual transference of the ark of God to the sanctuary on Zion it is far-fetched and misleading. But he has seen in that event a symbol of the final exaltation of Jehovah over rival gods because His true sanctuary is in heaven, the seat of all power.

St Paul's application of this verse to the Ascension of Christ only carries the suggestion embedded in the Psalm a stage further; he has altered 'received gifts *from* men' to 'received gifts *for* men.' But he was probably not the first to make that alteration; it had already been made by the Talmudic commentators, who thought this was more seemly as applied to God, who does not need to take anything from men's hands; so that it was now entirely suitable for a description of the Ascension, which was the prelude to the pouring forth of the gift of the

Holy Spirit upon mankind. And it is no unwarrantable application of the verse. There is nothing which really does justice to the language of the Psalmist save the Ascension. He had spiritualized an ecclesiastical procession as a symbol of Jehovah's exaltation to the throne of heaven; here was its actual fulfilment. We are compelled to admit that a spiritual imagination was at work in this author, which was premonitory of that great triumph of Christ which is called the Ascension.

1. *The Nature of the Ascension.*—It is both a physical event and a moral exaltation. What the whole series of events in which the life of Christ is set is meant to reveal is that fundamentally and finally the moral and the physical are not unrelated or opposed realms; but that the attainment of supreme moral excellence brings perfect control over the physical universe. Christ's resurrection was a fact which had manifestation in the physical realm; but the power which brought about the Resurrection was spiritual—the effect of transcendent holiness. In the same way the Ascension was not simply an elevation to some point in the skies over our heads, but the elevation of Christ to spiritual supremacy. On the other hand, it was not simply an invisible moral elevation; it was also an elevation into the realm of ultimate power, which means power not only over spiritual things but over the material universe as well; therefore it had a corresponding physical manifestation. There is nothing we need to have more firmly fixed in our faith than the belief that spiritual forces can change the nature of the physical universe.

2. *The Meaning of the Ascension.*—The farther we get away from the awful war the worse its effects are seen to be. Some hoped from the war a great settlement of the outstanding wrongs of European history. Others hoped that the idealism provoked by the war would give a tremendous impetus to all the ideals of social reform which had been struggling for recognition and realization: it would end class strife; it would quicken the sense of brotherhood; it would make possible a real reconciliation between forces that in politics, religion, and social reform had been opposed to one another. Others hoped from it a great religious revival: men would come back from that dreadful experience with eyes open to the reality of God; we should need less argument about the meaning and value of Christianity; it would now be patent to every one that Christianity was the one hope of the world.

What a disappointment it has been! After all the efforts at peace-making Europe is still smouldering everywhere, and threatening to blaze out into new wars. Secret diplomacy is still at work with its lying and spying. The building up of vast armaments continues everywhere. Coercion is still the one thing men in authority believe in; the only cure for force is more force, and the only protection against violence is in being violent yourself first. The vicious circles are found everywhere.

What, then, can be done? We must hold with joyous faith that the peasant Carpenter, by virtue of His triumph over the powers of this world, is at the Father's right hand in the one place of power; that among the spiritual realities He is enthroned as supreme, and by the spirits who understand He is recognized as the only Hope and Saviour of the world. We must commend the faith in these realities to all sorts and conditions of men. We must seek to impress upon the rulers of this world the fatal policy they are pursuing in trusting to repression, coercion, and force, and urge upon them a new policy of trust in man's response to the methods of Christ; persuade them of the reasonableness of seeking a way of reconciliation, try to win them from their fearful statecraft to one of greater generosity. What we must try to get out of men's minds is the idea that the whole business of government is a thing that stands right outside the religious realm, and that here Christian principles are inapplicable. What the Ascension means is that Christ is elevated to the position of supreme authority because of what He is and because of what He has done; because His way of friendship and hope and love is the only way that will work. Surely it needs little arguing at this time of day that, whether Christ's way would work or not, no other way works, and that, whatever risk it entails, it entails no such certainty of failure as the way of war, threats, violence, and intimidation.

¶ In one of Joseph Conrad's powerful stories, *The End of the Tether*, the central figure is an old man crouching at the wheel of the vessel whose command he will not relinquish although

he has gone blind. It is a true picture of the war system clinging to its grip on the world. That grip can be broken only by moral and spiritual force. The old notion that to build ship against ship and gun against gun and fort against fort was the way to secure peace has been discredited. The world knows now that men cannot make peace while they have war in their hearts.[1]

But to recommend any such method to men we must have a definite religious faith, a definiteness of which the belief in the Ascension of Christ is the test; the belief that God has highly exalted Him, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and dominion. Only if we believe this can we dare to put in operation the entire reversal of worldly policy that it recommends. What there is for us to do, who strive to hold both the doctrinal reality and the practical applicability of our faith, is to believe that, since our Lord has been exalted to the place of power, the very evolution of history must in time reveal to all men that Christ is the only King, His way of life the only solution, and His authority the only authority that shall never be shaken, His power the only power we can dare to trust.

Our Burden-Bearer

Ps. lxviii. 19.—'Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden' (R.V.).

The Revised Version enriches us with a great and precious promise by substituting for the familiar words, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits,' the more accurate and luminous declaration, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden.' That is the chief lesson God wishes us to learn, the supreme goal to which He is conducting our experience; and He has taken more pains to teach us that principle of living than any other truth He has given us.

He will not suffer us, if we are guided by His teaching and Spirit, to think of Him as simply transcending our life, living above it, and out of it, and looking on it as from a distance; but He assures us that He shares it, shares it to the uttermost, is in it and through and over and under all; in it always; Himself bearing the burdens of it, not now and again, at far-separated intervals and in the special crises of our experience; but 'daily'—'Blessed be the Lord who daily beareth our burdens.' It is the monotonous daily pressure of the same weight, in the same wearying way, that slays the hope in us; and it is exactly that hour-by-hour burden God Himself carries for us, and with us, and so sustains us and trains us.

That is the meaning of the Incarnation and of Calvary. 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' carrying the burdens of the flesh and using them in the education and growth of the soul and in the achievement of the supreme purposes of human redemption. And what fearsome burdens they are! How they irk us almost beyond all patience! In what innumerable ways and with what indescribable subtlety they limit and thwart and delude us! What constraint of will is required to make them the servants of the soul, so that we may grow under them just as the forces of life, from smallest moss to perfect man, overcome the dead forces of Nature. That He did, and did for us, so that we might see how He does it with us and for us now, day by day. God was in Christ. He comes right into our human life, through its lowest door and sharing its lowest conditions, wearing our vesture of decay and passing through our various and conflicting experiences. 'He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows.' 'He was in all points tempted like as we are.' He, the All-Holy, 'bore our sins in his own body on the tree.' It is the prerogative of purity to take away sin. Only He who is without blemish and without spot can deal with it effectively; and He has done it, and said to us with the authority of infinite love and infinite holiness, 'I, even I, have blotted out thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' So God frees us from that heaviest burden on the heart without whose removal we have not strength for service or pluck for warfare, even that of the sense of sin, the consciousness of a wrong relation to God.

So it is an undeniable fact that underneath the heavy and weary weight of the appalling accumulation of temptations and failures, of sorrows and mistakes and wrecked purposes, there is the mystery of the sympathy and fellowship of the tempted and victorious Christ lightening their pressure; and that, whilst life

[1] H. E. Luccock, *Preaching Values*, 126.

is not meant for happiness or for success, but for character, for goodness and truth and love, yet He knows the strength of our temptations, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. He is the Comforter, the Advocate standing alongside of us to strengthen us, so that we do not palter with any tempter, or yield to any treason of the will or illusion of the sense, or slip into any falsehood and insincerity of choice.

¶ It is an incalculable solace to feel a great, strong, and wise nature near us. Life is sweeter and purer in England because of the presence of some strong, calm, heroic souls who lead its life to universal justice, and will not be daunted. Men of distinction are a refuge in the day of trouble. England, menaced by the foreign foe, looks in the face of Pitt and is strong. The young Republic in its peril hears the voice of Washington and is fearless. The arrival of a physician amid the anxieties of the sick-room, with his calm spirit and strong word, 'Yes, I see; I know all; it is so and so,' inspires confidence and begins the healing ministry. So the fact of the larger, serener, purer life of God filling and forming the world is itself glad tidings of great joy to burdened men; and they say with the singing girl in 'Pippa Passes'—

> God's in his heaven—
> All's right with the world.

The gospel of Moses to his suffering brothers in Egypt was the cheering word of God: 'I have surely visited you and seen that which is done to you in Egypt.' The gospel of Jesus to His disciples is, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.'

Thou knowest all the present, each temptation,
  Each toilsome duty, each foreboding fear;
All to myself assigned of tribulation,
  Or to beloved ones than self more dear;
All pensive memories, as I journey on,
Longings for vanished smiles and voices gone!

Thou knowest all the future; gleams of gladness
  By stormy clouds too quickly overcast;
Hours of sweet fellowship, and parting sadness,
  And the dark river to be crossed at last:
Oh, what could confidence and hope afford
To tread that path but this, 'Thou knowest Lord'?

Thou knowest, not alone as God, all knowing;
  As man, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved
On earth with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
  O Saviour, Thou hast wept and Thou hast loved;
And love and sorrow still to Thee may come
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a home.

But our hardened hearts are often severely tempted to beg for deliverance rather than for strength. We cry for freedom from the daily strain rather than for the grace that will enable us to bear it without a murmur, and even to recognize it as a discipline. In the Slough of Despond we want to get out, without caring whether it is towards the City of Destruction or on the side that leads to the wicket-gate, the Cross, and the land of Beulah. Like the schoolboy perplexed with his problems, we would rather have them solved for us than be shown how to solve them ourselves. We forget that the great compulsions of life are its surest benedictions, and that God's promise is not to deliver us, but to sustain us by the infusion of His victorious life and the inspiration of His promises and sympathy. Tons of air press on living men, but being alive they move forward all unaware of them. So beneath the burdens of doubt, of social work, of increasing knowledge, of personal anguish, living men go from strength to strength until they appear perfect before God.

¶ Writing to a lady threatened with his own great sorrow, blindness, that brave saint and inspiring preacher, Dr Stanford, said—'I know every inch of the road up to the point you have reached. There is no black Pass of Glencoe, there is no "Dead Man's Lane" in it, but I have had to tremble there, at least for a short time; but I have not been killed, and have not been "robbed of my jewels," nor will you be. Believe in God's love, and let Him hold your hand. It is of no use trying to hurry the sunrise, and it is of no use saying "faster" to God's healing providence. Stay your mind on Him, and His perfect peace will help to make your eyes better, and meanwhile give you songs in the night.'[1]

[1] J. Clifford, *The Secret of Jesus*, 76.

War

Ps. lxviii. 30.—'Scatter thou the people that delight in war.'

We cannot adopt all the Psalmist's prayers, but this is a very Christian one. Our Lord was the Prince of Peace; His message was the tidings of Divine love, and He laid on His followers as a supreme duty the love of the Divine Family. Nothing is more sacred to those who profess and call themselves Christians than is the cause of peace and goodwill.

1. That war will end is the testimony of all prophecy. That was what the Israelites looked forward to as the chief characteristic of the Messianic time. The song of the heavenly host was a prophecy, and its fulfilment is part of the unfinished business of the world to-day. 'It is hopeless,' say some; 'look at the shameful condition of Christendom! International friendship is a chimera past praying for!' It may come only slowly, but we can discern progress. The moral sense of mankind is surely developing into a new type of higher power, and future generations will probably look upon our toleration and practice of war with much the same marvel with which we regard the barbaric customs of our ancestors. Formerly no one dreamed of apologizing for war. Multitudes exulted in it. But already war has to apologize for its existence. For who now thinks of war otherwise than as essentially evil—necessary, it may be, for a time, as a poisonous microbe injected into the frame of things to devour other microbes still more poisonous, yet none the less radically evil? A great advance in moral evolution has manifestly been made when, as now, conscience, erect and august, summons war to its bar to vindicate itself; instead of lying, as once it lay, prostrate and dumb under its Juggernaut wheels. Not so long ago private differences were not settled without a fight; with remarkable persistency men believed that God was on the side of the man who stabbed the more successfully. Then it gradually dawned on the common sense of most that the duel was about the worst possible method of arriving at a just conclusion. The same judicial principle which is now universally applied to private quarrels is applicable to international quarrels. War plunges us into the rule of force, from which the race has painfully struggled to emerge. War eliminates reason, consent and co-operation, which are the prerogatives of civilized men.

¶ I am shocked to recognize myself approving acts that I should normally detest. I loathe bombs, until I succeed in throwing them. A submarine seems to me a piece of devilish craftiness when it sends our poor fellows in the cruisers to the bottom: but it seems to me the symbol of the most glorious courage and skill when it strikes a German destroyer under the guns of Emden. The natural conscience is dislocated. I read quite calmly, and with gentle satisfaction, the assurances of the Press that the losses of the enemy were most gratifying. This is the war-temper. Such a temper is an outrage against man, a sin against God. It is under the curse of Christ. It puts His Cross to an open shame.[1]

2. We believe that the abiding forces that sway mankind are steadily making for peace. (1) Trade helps the cause of peace, for all honest trade rests on mutual advantage. (2) The costliness of war is so vast that rulers shudder at the idea of launching such tremendous engines of ruin and destruction, mutilation and murder; nay, the very preparations for the onslaught reduce great Powers to financial straits and indefinitely postpone the most necessary social reforms. (3) The glories of war are being found out, as the truth is more daringly told, and we see, instead of the glamour and romance, what a soul-blinding business of hate it is—squalid, sickening, unspeakable.

As boys we are told that war brings out heroic qualities. As well apologize for smallpox on the ground that doctors and nurses are, in tending its victims, made so self-denying. Moreover, the heroism which is brought out by fire, shipwreck, and mine explosions is a heroism which will match that of any battlefield that ever was.

¶ I don't know if readers of *The Cambridge Magazine* will agree, but I for one have no use at all for patriotic lyricism in this business. When it is over, indeed, no words shall be too solemn, as no thoughts can be too sad and holy, for the young who so blithely accepted their fate and went out to suffer and die for us all.

[1] H. Scott Holland, *So as by Fire*, i. 22.

Their recollected laughter is the noblest song we shall hear in our time. But the lads known to me, of all ranks, went off nursing no such pretty romantic bloodthirsty illusions about war as seem to be clung to by some of their elders at home.

> I only know
> That as he turned to go
> And waved his hand,
> In his young eyes a sudden glory shone.

—Yes: but it was the glory of gay sacrifice, not of gay ambition. In fact the youth of France and England had *found War out* even before this inferno started. They have had to accept it as the alternative to the ruination of better things: but I shall be surprised if they come back with any high opinion of War for War's sake—War as a 'purifier,' 'degeneracy's antiseptic,' 'toughener of the moral fibre'—or indeed are not impatient of all the maudlin disguises under which our pulpiteers and journalists present it.[1]

3. People are beginning to see that the prosperity of one nation is no menace to the welfare of another nation. How should it be? Are we not all bound in the bundle of life together, so that when one member suffers all the members suffer with it? Let us see to it that our patriotism is not a narrow one. Patriotism is not a thing pre-eminently of armies and navies. Does our love of home mean first and foremost our pride in the bolts and bars and alarums by means of which we contrive the safety of our home? Patriotism is the warmth of one's heart for one's own people, proud fidelity to the great ends for which the nation lives. Patriotism is love; why should we ally it with hate? My love of my home does not lead me to hate the homes of others. Patriotism is sacrifice—sacrifice of oneself for the common weal, not sacrificing others. Patriotism is ambition for the victory of all that is just and noble, that our country may be worthier to be loved by the whole band of nationalities. Nations are units in the great body of humanity. Everywhere this brave gospel of brotherhood between man and man is being preached. Presently men will decline to fight with their brothers. And the end may be nearer than we think, for great advances in history have usually come suddenly, however long the years of preparation. Already the dawn throws up light from the horizon, and men's minds dwell on the possibility of disarmament all round. Meantime the League of Nations holds the field and deserves support till we have the renunciation of war.

> These things shall be: a loftier race
> Than e'er the world hath known shall rise,
> With flame of freedom in their souls
> And light of knowledge in their eyes.
>
> They shall be gentle, brave, and strong
> To spill no drop of blood, but dare
> All that may plant man's lordship firm
> On earth, and fire, and sea, and air.
>
> Nation with nation, land with land,
> Unarmed shall live as comrades free;
> In every heart and brain shall throb
> The pulse of one fraternity.[1]

4. We must not lose sight of the fact that the future of the world depends on the result of the race between the champions of peace and fellowship and those of force. We must not deceive ourselves by supposing that the nations have left off preparing for war. Every factory that uses chemicals for the manufacture of food or other products is potentially an arsenal. Every aeroplane that may be constructed for commercial purposes is potentially a bombing machine. The horrors of such a scientific war are inconceivable and would mean nothing less than the end of civilization.

¶ Sir Oliver Lodge has appealed to the statesmen of all nations to curb the tendency of scientists to produce instruments of destruction. He points out that the wars of the future will be fought mainly in the air, and that aerial locomotion gives the means of delivering sudden and unexpected blows at a great distance, overwhelming a whole city in one vast destruction. Advances in chemistry are, he says, constantly producing new compounds, and it is possible to use the insidious and deadly microbe for wholesale extermination. Some idea of the horrors of the next war may be gathered from the fact that the range of guns has been doubled since the Armistice. The Chemical Warfare Service in America has discovered a liquid, three

[1] A. Quiller-Couch, in *Goodwill*, vol. ii. No. 1, p. 22.

[1] J. A. Symonds.

drops of which, when applied to any part of the skin, will cause a man's death. One aeroplane, carrying two tons of this liquid, could kill the whole population over miles of territory. 'When all was over,' says Winston Churchill, referring to the last war, 'torture and cannibalism were the only two expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian states had been able to deny themselves: and these were of doubtful utility.' [1]

So, whatever system of limitation of armaments and arbitration of disputes is established, unless there is widespread among the peoples 'a will to peace,' and not 'a will to war,' they will all be ineffective. The truest word was spoken by Goldwin Smith long ago, 'The only sure guarantee of peace is morality.'

On the Church lies the heaviest responsibility of all. For if the Church is a league of men and women who believe in God, who are prepared to risk something to side with Christ, who have the welfare of the human race at heart, it will strain every nerve and make every sacrifice in this enterprise of all enterprises. To make its influence felt against the mighty forces that are on the side of war it must be united, both in will and in act. It must be true to itself. For the Church by its very nature transcends differences of nationality and race. Its members are united to one another by participation in a common Divine life.

¶ We may recall the words of that great Christian soldier, Earl Haig, 'No military preparedness, no political expedient, can guarantee the kind of peace on which the heart of the world is set. The Christian religion, backed by a United Christendom, and a Church as daring and heroic on spiritual lines as the army has been on military lines, is the only hope of the world, and of the solution of the great problems with which the world is faced.'

We must take our stand by Christ and by that great multitude of men and women who through the ages have by their peace-making worked for a peace of God and, therefore, the peace of man. For this let a man live and die; let him be 'beside himself,' for, as Henry Drummond nobly said, 'To be beside oneself for Christ's sake is to be beside Christ, which is man's chief aim for time and for eternity.' [2]

[1] F. A. Atkins, *Who Laughs Last?* 75.
[2] F. T. Woods, *Great Tasks*, 28.

In the Strength of the Lord

(A New Year Address)

Ps. lxxi. 16.—'I will go in the strength of the Lord God.'

One of the advantages of the artificial division of time into cycles is that of enabling us to regard the commencement of each year as a time of new beginnings. The stimulus of a fresh start is made available even to the most disheartened. As from a mountain-peak, we are enabled to look out into a future illumined with new-born hope, and to set out afresh with quickened footsteps on our journey. Happy is the man whose heart re-echoes the Psalmist's word, and whose reasoned resolve is to go forth—as indeed he must—'in the strength of the Lord God'—as indeed he may. For this is the secret of gaining strength sufficient to make the future unlike the past, and to realize every hope of progress.

Stand out in the sunlight of Promise, forgetting
Whatever the Past held of sorrow or wrong.
We waste half our strength in a useless regretting;
We sit by old tombs in the dark too long.

Have you missed in your aim? Well, the mark is still shining.
Did you faint in the race? Well, take breath for the next.
Did the clouds drive you back? But see yonder their lining.
Were you tempted and fell? Let it serve for a text.

As each year hurries by let it join that procession
Of skeleton shapes that march down to the Past,
While you take your place in the line of Progression,
With your eyes on the heavens, your face to the blast.[1]

1. To every man life is ordinarily and necessarily a going forth. We have to go out daily to a practically unknown journeying. And

[1] Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

nothing is more important than that its general direction should be already determined by a consecration which comprehends the unknown alike with the known. The great danger into which many lives fall is that of a haphazard carelessness both as to the going and as to the goal. They are content merely to drift on in obedience to every wind and current without having any definite idea as to direction. A good-natured hope that somehow or other all will be well in the end, and an easy tolerance of everything that is not obviously wrong seem to constitute their entire moral equipment for the serious duty of living. And it is not too much to say that nothing of real worth in any realm ever comes to such casual lives. A voyage without a chart is apt to end in a wreck. For life is a bigger and more serious thing than we are usually inclined to regard it; and one of the tragedies of the present day is that of finding and contenting ourselves with too easy an interpretation of its meaning, its mystery, and its majesty.

Now the first clear duty of each of us is an honest determination of life's direction. Many divergent paths seem to meet at our feet; and each of them has some sort of attractiveness, and makes some sort of appeal to us. But only he who looks life squarely in the face, and resolutely sets himself to reach the highest and best is worthy of its treasure and trust. He alone who takes God's direction, the way of loyalty and hence often the way of loneliness, can hope to find his own largest and fullest being. Of course, such a determination must be made not in a burst of blinding emotion, but with full certainty of going on into new and growing experience of conflict with opposing forces, of self-discovery, of refining discipline, and of almost overwhelming opportunity and necessity of losing self in service. For to go in the way of the Lord means all this. But it means more also: for he who makes such determination goes courageously onward, goes on into ever new amazement at His goodness and patience, and ever new satisfaction at the sufficiency of His assistance. 'I will go in the strength of the Lord' is the vow which answers before it comes every tempting suggestion to turn to the right hand or the left. For it expresses the determining consecration of the heart which, being pure, has seen God; and in His light has also seen light.

All my life long
I most have prized the man who knew himself,
And knew the ways before him, rough or smooth,
And from amongst them chose, not blindly brave,
But with considered courage and calm will, and having chosen,
With a steadfast mind pursued his purposes.

. . . . .

There is no chance, no destiny, no fate
Can circumvent or hinder or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.

2. It takes some of us a long time to learn the limitations of self-help. We set out full of confidence and buoyancy, with a slightly contemptuous opinion of the foe, and with no disposition to learn anything from the failures of others. With a jaunty certainty of superiority and success, we confidently go forward—and fail. And this we do again and again, until the fact of our strengthlessness penetrates through the resisting self-confidence, and we at length acknowledge our utter insufficiency. It is no easy thing to yield up our fancied strength and to resist every opposing influence to self-surrender. It is one of the great struggles of the soul. But its pain is as the birth-pang of a new life. 'I will go in the strength of the Lord God' is the word of a victory which makes all other conquests possible. It expresses a view of life which is worthy and inspiring. It says, not that life is small and sorrowful, and that therefore God is needed to strengthen and sweeten it—a view which far too generally obtains; it declares rather that life is large and great and powerful, and that therefore God is needed for its sure guidance and reinforcement. Its ideals are so exalted that every best endeavour needs supplementing strength ere they can be realized. If our destiny were lower our difficulties would be less. Mere human power is adequate enough if the goal aimed at is low enough—if it is merely social, commercial, intellectual. But if it be Divine, as it is; if the objective be the acquisition of character, which is capacity for eternal service, then we must have an unbroken communication of the strength of the Lord God.

¶ Beware of finding too easy an interpretation of life. If you were to study the Greek manuscripts from which we get the text of our

New Testament you would sometimes find two different renderings of the same text. Now, whenever that happens, the student, amongst other things of course, has to remember this law of criticism, ' The more difficult reading is to be preferred.' I will tell you why. When a scribe was copying a portion of Scripture, say a passage from St Paul, if he came to a word that he could not understand he was tempted now and again to substitute for it an easier word—something that made sense as he thought. He was never tempted to take a plain verse and put in a word that made its meaning hard and obscure. So the student has to remember that of two readings the harder one—the one that takes more understanding, more thinking out—is probably the older and truer one. So is it with life. It is the hard reading that is the true one. Jesus Christ has given that interpretation of life to us all. For ease, He says, we must read discipline, for pleasure we must read duty, for man's desire we must read God's commandment, and for self-interest we must read sacrifice. And these words that Jesus has given us as the true reading of life reveal to us a path that no man can find and follow unless he has the Divine Friend at his side.[1]

3. It is only the strength of the Lord God that can repair the ravage of sin in any life. And here we touch the very core of the difficulty of worthy living. The strengthlessness of desire and will and effort of which we are made conscious continually is nothing more than the product of sin, either of commission or of omission, or of both. And it takes God Himself to repair the debilitated capacity and recreate the impaired power. It is only the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus which can set us free from the law of sin and death. And this is the pledge of the Atonement. For in the sacrificial gift of His Son He has placed Himself in His essential power at the disposal of faith and love. Christ is the strength of God, and He saves to the uttermost. How frequently do we hear the great Sacrifice proclaimed as though its main work were the procuring and declaring of pardon; whereas this, rightly understood, is but the entrance upon a renewed and an abundant life. Such inadequate conception almost invariably leads to a nerveless and languid spiritual life whose chief solicitude is self. In reality, however, true Christian life is not an easy receiving but a venture. Its main expression is not a song, but a strife. Its true attitude is not that of resting, but resisting. Its worthiest fruit is not an ecstasy, but an energy which makes for righteousness, and labours toward the extension of the Kingdom of Christ in the world.

4. Perhaps the hardest task for any man is the recovery of lost inspirations and enthusiasms. There is something entirely elusive about them which defies all effort at recapture; and but few of us ever succeed in regaining what has somehow been lost by negligence or wilfulness. Memory is apt to mock at the result of every struggle by making vivid the experiences of former days, and compelling comparison. But memory must not be allowed to become despotic; for the past is not the highest type of life for any one. The gospel is always beckoning us on to higher heights than have been scaled, and to completer victories than have ever been experienced. It replaces the old and now irrecoverable inspirations by newer and stronger creations. It asserts the vital connection between determination and dynamic. To the obedient believer support is proportioned to strain; and as is his day so shall be his strength. All of which means that there is no promise of power to the morally indolent; but that to the one who honestly sets himself to obey Christ there is no lack.

¶ It is an accepted fact of Nature that in every cubic foot of air there is locked away one thousand foot-tons of power. Science is thereby challenged with the task of unlocking this store, and of leading it forth for the service of the world in the form of light, heat, and energy. And to this all modern scientific discovery and invention tends—the making actual of the potential, by observance of the increasingly apprehended laws which govern air-pressure and the like. Similarly, every Divine precept, every necessary duty, every obvious obligation, and every unavoidable conflict is charged with Divine power. The problem of the Christian life is to unlock and use it.

How fruitful of illustration of this close connection between determination and dynamic is an even casual glance at the records of the great men and women in the Bible. And these are

[1] P. C. Ainsworth.

but typical of the unnumbered host whose lives attest the safety and certainty of trust and obedience—a host whose leader is the Lord Christ Himself. For right through His earthly life, when the dawning consciousness of His mission overtook Him, when the fires of hatred blazed around Him, when the voice of human affection dissuaded Him, when the loneliness of unrequited love discouraged Him, when the fleeting splendours of the world tempted Him, when the Cross loomed out of the gathering darkness and frowned upon Him, He did, in effect, say, with the calm courage of One who knew all it implicates, 'I will go in the strength of the Lord God.' And His going forth has compassed the world's salvation.

For each one of us the gospel of His grace is for all time comprehended in this—'Follow thou me.' Only let us remember, as we make or renew our determination, that it is the *Lord* God whose strength is our sufficiency. His enthronement conditions our enduement.

Mountain Peace

Ps. lxxii. 3.—'The mountains shall bring peace to the people.'

Holy Scripture is full of mountain feeling. Alpine in parts, even its level plains are girt about with dewy hills. The history of saints and seers is the history of the great mountains on which they saw God and knew their destiny; the whole life of man is one long ascent up the Hill of God. Jesus taught on the Galilean hills. There He remained alone with the Father; there He prayed through long, dew-drenched nights; there He stood with Moses and Elias and held dread converse concerning the exodus He was to accomplish; there, with the kingdoms of the world at His feet, He engaged in grim conflict with the enemy. Historian, prophet, and poet conspire to flash a thousand rays of heavenly light upon the mountain-tops of earth, and still the ultimate secret of the hills abides with God. Yet the Bible abounds in spiritual intimations concerning the mountain element in life which takes us to the threshold of deep mysteries.

Such a spiritual intimation was made when the Psalmist declared that 'the mountains shall bring peace unto the people.' It belongs to the tragedy of life that we connect peace with the valleys, equating it with easy agreement, snug comfort, mutual accommodation, prudential compromise. And if peace be a compact between parties aiming at the greatest possible material advantage of both, then God's mountains cannot bring peace but only a sword. But the peace of the mountains is not a diplomatic arrangement, based upon the adroit adjustment of equally selfish claims. It is the brotherhood of those who put their neighbours' good before their own, and the Kingdom of God before either. It is the *modus vivendi* of those who have first entered upon harmonious relations with Eternal Righteousness and Truth and Love. We are slow to learn that it is far better to struggle for the high mountain realities of life than to live in ease by doing base traffic with the small coin of the valley.

> Oh, better far, to climb the toilsome height
> Than linger in the valley's flowered way;
> Far better in a losing cause to fight
> Than feel one's sinews wasting day by day.
> To taste the hemlock bitter, face the night,
> Than die the daily death of apathy.

The principle goes to the very roots of the individual life that is the basis of the community. To every soul it is the mountains, and only the mountains, that can bring peace. We may gain a sleek contentment, an enjoyable quietude, a pleasant spiritual serenity and comfort in the valleys of life. But peace is not inertia; it is not mere quietness; it is certainly not comfort. It is the perfect poise of those whose being is centred in God—that unification of the personality in which every power comes to its own by being rightly related to the Centre.

1. *The Solitude of the Mountains.*—The mountains bring peace to the soul, for they are the home of solitude, and it is in solitude that man fully becomes man. That we feel uneasy in solitude and silence, haunted by a dumb inarticulate fear of what lies hidden in its pregnant depths, is an irrefutable proof that we have fallen from our God-intended destiny. John Pulsford has voiced for us the cry of a man in a time of unwelcome solitude, when the soul—the real self to which he is a stranger—threatens to rise out of the grave of the body, and he is afraid. 'Oh, for some noise, some outside show, to lay the ghost of my soul in the grave again!

This silent, conscious man within a man—this awful soul, beset before and behind by the great, silent God, and compassed about by a great, silent Eternity—is too much for me!' But if we knew the things that belong to our peace, we would welcome solitude. For it is only as we meet with God alone, and suffer His fires to purge our souls, that we possess the house of our humanity in peace.

2. *The Fellowship of the Mountains.*—If the mountains are the home of solitude, they are also the place of true fellowship. This paradox is inherent in life. It is only among men who have learnt the secrets of the mountains that the highest fellowship is possible. We are torn by dissension on the plains, but on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James and John—men continents apart in taste and temperament—are made one as they gaze upon the Glory of God. Denominational strife may rage in the valleys of ecclesiastical life; but when Christian scholars gather round the open Bible, the Churchman and the Nonconformist rejoice in their debt to each other, and each makes his contribution to the common stock in perfect goodwill and sympathetic understanding. To everyone who is willing to accept the reproof of life, ripening experience reveals how little we are divided, and how fundamentally and indissolubly we are united in those deep simplicities of life which are also its highest mysteries. Here the laws of the spiritual world contradict the laws of the natural. We crowd and hurt each other on the broad, level highways: only on the mountain-peaks is there room for all. Those who climb above the small dust of controversy into the nearness of God always find their brethren there, and marvel how eye sees to eye on the clear heights.

¶ In John Wesley's *Journal*, under the date October 9, 1741, we read this: 'I found Mr Humphreys with Mr Simpson. They immediately fell upon their favourite subject; on which, when we had disputed two hours, and were just where we were at first, I begged we might exchange controversy for prayer. We did so, and then parted in much love, about two in the morning.'

3. *The Vision of the Mountains.*—The mountains bring peace because they are places of vision. They stand for the far look, the wide horizon, the illimitable distance. They preach spaciousness, and it is spaciousness the soul needs if it would dwell in peace. In the cramped ways of life are dispeace and deterioration. We begin as practical helpers, and end as soulless officials. We begin as inspirers of our brethren, and end as purveyors of religious platitudes to the crowd. We begin as sowers of precious seed, and end as mere uprooters of weeds. Life is scarred with decadence, chiefly because we forget that man needs the immensities. In our legitimate striving to make the truth of God homely and relevant to everyday needs we forget that man does not live by what he understands and can immediately apply, but by the vision that leaves him filled with a sense of that greatness of God which is at once his dread and his true home. Our supreme need is to get to the place where, touched by what we cannot understand and caught up into the illimitable spaces of God, we exclaim: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep.[1]

The Revelation of the Rain

Ps. lxxii. 6.—'He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.'

The Bible is specially beautiful and suggestive in its similes. It finds the earth full of figures, symbols, illustrations, analogies, by means of which it attempts to set forth the glory and the wonder of spiritual things. What an eye Christ had for such things! 'The kingdom of heaven is like . . .'—then followed some natural illustration, some familiar incident, some dramatic story, and through it men *saw* His meaning, reflected as if in a mirror. That is better than argument, and better than cloudy philosophy. Revelation comes to us in many ways. It is a large and many-sided term. Revelation is not a library study merely; it is a nature study, a history study, a heart study. This writer directs us to the study of God in Nature. That may be a good point to begin at. Nature is at least accessible; she provides us with the alphabet of things; through wonder we may be led on to worship.

[1] E. Herman, *The Touch of God*, 54.

Is there a more beautiful sight than a meadow covered from end to end with tall ripe grass crowned with rich dark purple heads of blossom and seed, and rippling in light and shadow like the waves of the sea, as the sun and the wind chase each other over them. But let us go back to the same field when the hay-makers have done their work, and how desolate is the spectacle which it presents! Nothing remains but the stubble protruding an inch or two above the soil, and forming a pale, sickly yellow sward without grace of form or beauty of colour. The desolation of the spectacle is greatly aggravated during a season of drought, when the pitiless sun scorches the shorn field, and it makes no effort to recover what it has lost. But how striking is the change when a shower of rain comes! The dry, faded sward begins to brighten and assume a tinge of verdure, and as the soft reviving rain continues, the healing process goes on, until, at last, an aftermath is formed which may be even more luxuriant than was the field in its first fresh, strong growth.

¶ Three days ago the field, in its pageant of fresh beauty, with shimmering blades and tossing banners, greeted sun and shower alike with joy for the furtherance of its life and purpose; now, laid low, it hears the young grass whisper the splendour of its coming green; and the poor swathes are glad at the telling, but full of grief for their own apparent failure. Then in great pity comes the rain, the rain of summer, gentle, refreshing, penetrating, and the swathes are comforted, for they know that, standing to greet or prostrate to suffer, the consolations of the former and the latter rain are still their own, with tender touch and cool caress. Then, once more parched by the sun, they are borne away to the new service their apparent failure has fitted them for; and perhaps as they wait in the dark for the unknown that is still to come they hear sometimes the call of the distant rain, and at the sound the dry sap stirs afresh—they are not forgotten and can wait. 'He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass,' sang the poet of the sheepfolds. Even so He came and shall come.[1]

It is of this new growth that the Psalmist is here thinking. And it is an attractive description of the reviving and fructifying sway of Christ. What new growth our Lord has caused among the peoples! 'Surely the people is grass,' and the grass withereth unless the rain falls. The Christ came to a world thirsting for God as the mown grass for the showers of heaven; to a race shorn of its glory; to a manhood clipped and low, with no power of self-recovery, its very roots parched. His life poured out for us and upon us has made a harvest possible on bare fields. It is now growing. The race is quickened in Christ and producing the fruits of the Spirit in newness of life. Much of the new growth is tender grass as yet. The idea of human brotherhood was born of Christ. There never were so many agencies working for the destruction of hate and tyranny as to-day. Never was brotherly love so active. The vision of our Psalmist concerning his expected King—'In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace till the moon be no more'—is a long way from fulfilment; but, at least, we may say that the desire for peace on earth and goodwill among men was never keener than to-day. We in this country live so continuously among the results of Christianity that we have lost the power to discern and appreciate the many beautiful growths which sprang, newly-born, at the coming of the King.

'He shall come down like rain.' How does the rain come?

1. *It comes freely.*—We cannot summon it at will; by no secret incantation and by no scientific experiment can we bring down the shower from the open sky. It comes spontaneously; by a law of its own it comes to bless the parched ground and bring it to fertility and beauty. In this we see a parable of God's dealings with us. The richest and most vital disclosure of God is a free gift. We could not command it; we have not earned it; it has come to us out of the infinite fullness of God's nature, an expression of His eternal tenderness and comparison. One of the apostles, emphasizing this fact, declares, 'He first loved us.' That is what draws forth man's affection; that is the creative love. Our love is not self-originated; it is called forth—summoned from our renewed nature, as the harvest is summoned from the earth by the fertilizing shower. We do not invent our gospel; we receive it. 'I delivered unto you that which I received,' writes St Paul. It is a gospel we must take

[1] Michael Fairless, *The Roadmender*.

humbly and gratefully as a gift from God. The entrance into life is through the lowly portal of humility and penitence. Those who allow themselves to think seriously about these things know enough about human nature to know that it is deeply wounded somewhere, and sorely stands in need of healing; and in Jesus Christ we believe that the healer has come.

2. *It comes gently.*—Watch rain descending after a long drought; see how the parched earth drinks it thirstily, how every tree and plant and flower absorbs it into its almost withered roots, how the drenched soil gives forth a sweet wholesome scent as of grateful incense, how the dried-up streams begin to fill and run and go singing again over the stones. Nature is full of these gentle ministries. Storms and earthquakes are exceptional; cataclysms and catastrophes are few. It is not God's way to work by violence when a gentle method is possible. The regular ministries of God are so quiet that we scarcely notice them.

¶ Go into the great forests of the Adirondacks and lie down at night by your camp fire. A silence as of death overhangs the scene. Now and then one may hear a dropping of broken twig or leaf, the hum of an insect, the restless movement of a bird upon its perch. Occasionally the forest will be startled by the sudden sweep and crash of some gigantic plant monarch as it falls, seemingly without cause, and awakes thunderous echoes on the silent night. The rising breeze, as it soughs and moans through limbs and leaves, will often break the stillness. But besides these external signs of life there is no voice to speak to you of that great work which Nature there is doing. And what is Nature doing? She is lifting up a forest of unnumbered trees towards the skies; she is forming timber that shall build our houses, span our rivers and streams with bridges, and frame the great ships that go down to the seas with our commerce. Forest building is a silent work. Thus it is through all the realm of Creation.[1]

Is it not thus that God comes in the history of nations? The history of a nation is not all war and tumult and upheaval and revolution. Political crises may arise now and then, industrial disturbances may sometimes put a nation in peril; and these are the things we hear of and are made insistently aware of; but these are merely the earthquakes and cyclones of history. The historian takes little or no note of the quiet, inconspicuous, daily life of the people; the newspaper has no record of the pleasant life of a thousand happy homes; the persistent duty, the patient love, the heroic suffering, the thoughts and emotions of a thousand hearts finding expression in unselfish deeds—these have no historian, yet they are the greater and the richer and the nobler part of history. Is it not so with the individual life? The years bring their crises no doubt; they have their outstanding events, their memorable occasions—a severe temptation, a lamentable failure, a success in business or a victory in the inner life, a momentous meeting, a birth, a death—these things mark certain critical experiences, and they are set like milestones along the road; God came almost visibly to us at such points, but what of the long miles between these measuring stones? Was He not with us in it all, in the daily work, the hours of quiet thought, the homely pleasures, the long seasons during which (as we say) 'nothing happened'? It is in those very seasons that the *most* is happening. God is coming down like rain; and though at the time we hardly notice it, there is a secret nourishment being poured into the very roots of our life.

3. *It comes revivingly.*—'As the rain cometh down from heaven and returneth not thither but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth,' so 'he comes down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth,' and the earth puts on new beauty, the beauty of newness of life in Him. There is no experience so desperate that it cannot be touched by the reviving hand of God. We are absolutely and utterly dependent upon Him for renewal of life and power in the deepest crises of our life. Let a man lose hope, let him lose character, let him lose faith, let him lose the moral force and spiritual energy that make him as the salt of the earth and what can revive him, what can reinstate him in his self-respect and bring back the glow of hope to his heart? Can science, or wealth, or intellect do it? Can any proposition the world can make or any possession the world values give him the satisfaction and peace his weary heart craves? He may sit in the darkness of sin, in the shadow of doubt,

[1] H. C. M'Cook, *The Gospel in Nature*, 33.

amid the ruin of broken hopes, in the bitterness of an incommunicable sorrow, and the world has no answer to his despair. But a voice reaches him in the depth of the silence, saying, 'Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.' Even on the barren ground of a hopeless and misspent life Christ can come down with regenerating power. A life can be changed, remade. My child, 'I give thee My forgiveness, I give thee My peace, I give thee Myself.' And in that moment the man knows that God has come down to him like rain upon the mown grass, and he begins to live again.

¶ No more pathetic and tragic picture of human sin was ever penned than was penned by John Masefield in *The Everlasting Mercy*. Saul Kane was a drunkard, a libertine, coarse in every fibre of his being, a human wreck, a piece of immoral driftwood in the cross-currents of the world. He lived, he said, 'in disbelief of heaven.' He drank; he fought; he poached; he cursed, and nineteen times he went to jail. Yet this man found mercy and light and purity. He became so pure in heart by the grace of God that his last words sang of purity:

O lovely lily clean,
O lily springing green,
O lily bursting white,
Dear lily of delight,
Spring in my heart agen
That I may flower to men.

He came to Christ in his sin and shame, just as he was. It was a change, sudden, revolutionary, transforming. In his own language, something broke inside his brain. Old things passed away and all things suddenly became new.[1]

The Consecration of the Earthly

Ps. lxxii. 19.—'And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory.'

If our earth has no sanctities for us our heaven will have none. If there is nothing sacred in time there will be nothing sacred in eternity. The discovery of a mystical gateway on some common bit of earthly ground gives a new significance to everything. A vision at Bethel—that unromantic spot!—with its mystical ladder uniting earth and heaven, creates a new conception of the universe. A local altar has influences which encircle the globe. And therefore it becomes a matter of uttermost importance when we consecrate our earthly home—its common roads, its fellowships, its ordinary comings and goings, its daily ups and downs, its customary business, its recurring periods of rest. We must diligently look for the sacred gateways in the midst of Nature's loveliness, and we must pass through them and reverently enter another realm of surpassing loveliness, of which the first is only the outer symbol. We must practise reading the literature of Nature, in confident assurance that every beautiful thing has something to say to us if only we will take the trouble to learn the language.

¶ Study nature as the countenance of God! Try to extract every line of beauty, every association, every moral reflection, every inexpressible feeling from it.[1]

You deny the existence of God?

Look forth on those forest-clothed hills,
Hark to the song of the birds,
Gaze up at the stars in the night,
Hear the call of the children at play.

Why, the world is resplendent with God:
His glory cannot be veiled:
Through the garment of matter it shines,
As the sun through a curtain of cloud.

Man needs but the listening ear,
But the eye that is willing to see:
With these he shall know and be glad
In the living assurance of God.[2]

If we begin all our thinking with the assumption that earth is only a sort of caravansary where we put up for a single night, a sort of small stage for little events, we shall never apprehend the real sublimity of life, nor shall we tread our daily road in fellowship with a mighty purpose. We have sometimes sung the words, 'Earth is a desert drear.' But where can such teaching be found in the word of our Lord? We go on to say, 'Heaven is our home.' Yes, indeed it is, but in the bounty of Divine grace we can find some of the glory here. 'The Hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets before we reach the heavenly

[1] H. T. Kerr, *The Gospel in Modern Poetry*, 123.

[1] Charles Kingsley.
[2] *The Sacrament of Common Life*, 46.

fields!'—that is better, and we are justified in liking it, because it is backed by the word of the Lord Christ. What wonderfully novel and inspiring things Bunyan's pilgrim found upon the road long before he reached the Celestial City! And this in spite of all the fights he waged, and the tears he shed. Think of the refreshing springs he found just where he needed them. Think of the pleasant arbours which he found prepared for him on the slopes of exhausting hills. And then the lilies—growing in the Valley of Humiliation! And there were strange reviving fragrances on the road like the wafting of the scent of the sweet briar. The Lord of the Highway had taken great thought for His pilgrims. Earth was redolent of heaven, and provision was everywhere made for daily growth, and for enlarging consecration and service.

How, then, may we increasingly consecrate this world through which we have to pass on the way to our eternal home?

First of all, *by a deepening adoration.* It can only be attained by the assiduous practice of reverence. The good bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* said that his desires gathered about two things—some flowers on the earth and some stars in the skies. We see in his aspiration an attitude which looks up and one which looks down. And shall we say that the 'looking up' at the stars, and the 'looking down' at the flowers were to be complementary acts in reverential worship? In aspiration and admiration he was to find the reality and the gladsomeness of life. But did these flowers of earth not mean something more than this? They surely referred to all the sweet and fragrant things of life—its tender affections, its simple courtesies, its kindnesses, and in these the good bishop's spirit was to find reverent communion with God. And then the stars above! The gleamings of Divine truth! And especially, and beyond all and everything else, the wonderful shining of Him who is known to us as the bright and Morning Star. We cultivate the spirit of adoration by looking always and everywhere for God, and by seeking to incarnate the revelation in our own daily life and practice.

A second way of consecrating our earthly home is *by an ever-expanding affection.* We make every place sacred when we make it the habitation of a larger love. Wherever and whenever love finds a new expression, God's world receives a deeper consecration. Love always converts a house into a home, and more love makes the home more lovely. And in its new power love makes new discoveries of the love of God and of the world of human life. 'Let your love abound yet more and more in all knowledge and discernment.' The bigger love always finds itself in a bigger world; new side chapels are revealed in the growing cathedral of human life.

And, lastly, we consecrate our earthly home in *an enlarging sense of duty* and in the quest of nobler service. Whenever a moral obligation becomes a delight the earth is being enriched. Whenever a necessary yoke is worn with joy the road is transfigured. Whenever we have brought out our wallet and ministered to someone who is bruised and broken, and when we have done it as one of the joys of life, we have left a fragrance about the place as of incense which gathers about an altar.

¶ 'Life,' said Dr Grenfell, 'is to me very beautiful. Life is a thousand times worth while.' He wrote this while the little hospital ship upon which he went on his far errands of mercy lay in the shadow of the terrific cliffs of Labrador, and the gathering storm shut in from the sea. He wrote it with facts of suffering and poverty vivid in his knowledge—desperate battling of fisher fleets with the sea, hunger and cold and shipwreck on that forbidding coast, and always the ominous prospect of want and starvation in the winter for those with whom the season's fishing was a failure, and for the families of the men who went down on sunken ships. Yet, in the midst of that, he found life splendid because it could be filled with the joy of service—of fearless struggle, of sacrifice, of love.[1]

Loyalty to the Saints

Ps. lxxiii. 15.—'If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.'

The Old Testament does not often speak of children of God, yet no one would have any difficulty in understanding to whom the Psalmist here refers. In the Book of Deuteronomy the Israelites generally are described by this title:

[1] W. R. Bowie, *The Road of the Star.*

'ye are children to Jehovah your God; ye shall not follow any heathen custom.' But even in ancient times it had become plain that they were not all Israel that were of Israel; within the wide circle of the nation there was a narrower circle of those who really were what it was called to be. It is this narrower circle, the true people of God, who are here described as the generation of His children. They have a character of their own; they have hopes and convictions peculiar to themselves; they form a party and an interest distinct from everything else in the world.

This was not only true when the Psalms were written; it is true to-day. The one mark of the children of God which never varies is that they believe in Him. In various modes, through all sorts of discouragement, they look unceasingly to Him, believing that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him. The Old Testament does not contain any doctrines, and this faith is the whole of its religion. It is the element in the life of our race which ennobles it and makes it great. It is that which has inspired every kind of virtue —patience, self-denial, self-sacrifice, superiority to the senses and to the world in which they live. Could there be a more fatal symptom of a bad heart than that one should be a traitor to those who represent this great cause upon the earth?

It will enable us to appreciate this more truly if we consider some of the ways in which faith in God is manifested, and in which we may prove untrue to it.

1. Faith in God implies *faith in His government of the world.* This is the particular aspect of faith with which the Psalmist is here concerned. No doubt it belongs to the nature of faith that it should be tried; if there were not appearances against it, it would not be faith; it would be sight. The contrary appearances are what challenges faith and puts it to the proof, and it is in asserting itself against them that faith shows its genuineness and strength. It is manifest that the Psalmist had had more than enough to try *his* faith in the Divine government. When he looked abroad upon the earth, it was as though God had abandoned it, or rather as though there were no God at all. He saw all power and prosperity in the hands of the wicked, and he saw this power and prosperity generate in them an arrogant and godless confidence which language almost fails to describe. What was the use of trying to be good? What profit was it to serve God? Goodness was a mere futility which in the life of the world did not count at all. Such were the thoughts which rose in this good man's mind as he looked round him on the moral confusions of earth. But all of a sudden they were checked. What, he asks himself, does the indulgence of this sceptical temper mean? It means that I am betraying the cause for which the children of God have fought the good fight from generation to generation. God forbid! Shall my mind cherish thoughts, shall my lips speak words, that are disloyal to their faith, their hopes, their sacrifices? The feeling that such scepticism would range him in base opposition to the Israel of God is the first thing which rallies the Psalmist again to assert his faith.

The things that tried the Psalmist's faith have not yet vanished from the world. Those who endured through weary years the indescribable horrors of war—those who realize what is involved in the position and influence of the liquor trade in this country—those who see how human beings are dehumanized alike by the excessive wealth and the extreme poverty which our civilization seems to engender: these may well be tempted to wonder whether God does govern the world, or whether He cares at all for what happens here. But let no one think that the trials of faith are arguments for unbelief. No: they are trumpet calls for witnesses for God; for men and women who will fight God's battle against all odds, and though they die fighting die assured of victory at last. All the hope of the world lies in them, not in the cynical or sceptical who say, How doth God know?

And in our own private concerns, as well as in the larger outlook upon life, this temptation has to be encountered and overcome. There are people who seem haunted by misfortune. For a while they bear up against their troubles, and ascribe them to chance or to some mismanagement of their own; but as courage fails they are tempted to say, The strife is useless; there is no care taken by God of human life, or we could never fare thus. But to speak so is to desert the faith of all the good. It is to separate ourselves from those to whose patience

and hope all that is finest in human character is due.

¶ My assurance grows firmer, from day to day, that we are in stronger hands than our own. It is true that I see things in other lives which look as if those hands were wantonly cruel, hard, unloving; but I reflect that I cannot see all the conditions; I can only humbly fall back upon my own experience, and testify that even the most daunting and humiliating things have a purifying effect; and I can perceive enough at all events to encourage me to send my heart a little farther than my eyes, and to believe that a deep and urgent love is there.[1]

2. Faith in God's government of the world is what the Psalmist is fighting for, but faith in God has other aspects. It involves *faith in the authority of His law.* It means the conviction that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong which can never be explained away. There are, as we know, philosophers who refuse to accept any such distinction. On the ground that the moral consciousness in man has developed, they hold that all definitions of right and wrong are relative. Nor is it only philosophers or professional moralists who speak thus. A vast proportion of the general literature which deals with human life takes this sceptical attitude. It takes it avowedly and of set purpose. It lays itself out to show that the man who asserts the absolute authority of what he calls the law of God—or rather of what the generation of God's children have always recognized as His law—is a dull and narrow-minded man, with no flexibility of intellect, no sensitiveness to the multiplicity of Nature and needs to be mentally emancipated.

Think, for example, of the matter of personal purity. Every one who has been brought up in the Christian Church knows the law of personal purity which is constituted by the teaching and the life of Jesus. He knows that this is the will of God that every one should keep his body in purity and honour. But he will very soon discover that there are philosophies of morality which cannot vindicate and do not promulgate any such law. An ostentatiously anti-Christian writer, like the late Sir Leslie Stephen, frankly acknowledges that those thinkers who have sought to explain morality on utilitarian grounds have shown as a rule a strong tendency to relaxed ideas on this vital subject. And how many novelists there are, exhibiting their criticism of life in all languages, who seem to have it as their one motive to show that there is nothing absolute in the seventh commandment. What should we say when we encounter ideas of this kind, in philosophy or in literature, in cruder or in subtler forms? Let them be met on their own ground, by all means; let bad philosophy be confuted by good; let the inadequacy of such theories to explain the actual moral contents of life be made clear; but before everything, let the soul purge itself from every shadow of complicity in them in the indignant words of the Psalm, 'If I spoke thus, I should be false to the generation of God's children.' I should desert those who have done more than all others to lift the life of man from the natural to the spiritual level.

3. Once more, faith in God implies *faith in His promises:* it implies in the last resort faith in the greatest of His promises, the promise of eternal life. This is directly suggested by the context. True, it was not at first seen by believers in God. The God whom faith apprehends is so great that all that is involved in faith cannot be apprehended in an instant. But it comes into view by degrees. As one of the fathers of the Scottish Church says, 'Eternity is wrapt up and implied in every truth of religion.' A religious life, or a life of faith, means at bottom life in God; and life in God is life over which death has no power. The Psalmist had attained to this truth, and gives expression to it in words of deathless sublimity and beauty. 'Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.' This is the full compass of faith in God—faith with its amplest range of vision, and speaking in its clearest tones.

But how few there are who can naturally speak thus? How difficult it is for us, when we use such words in our praise, to feel that we have any right to them! Our own faith in immortality is often languid, often in abeyance.

[1] A. C. Benson, *The Upton Letters*, 5.

We are painfully sensible of all the appearances which are against it. We feel our kinship with all the other life in the world, which is not immortal. The statement once made by Lord Lister at the British Association—that anæsthetics suspend the functions of vegetable as well as of animal life—in its simple truth makes the blood run cold. It is all one thing, we seem to feel, in plant, in animal, in man; it springs from one fountain, it runs one course, it comes to one end.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel the difficulties which are thus created for faith, and another to succumb to them. There are two ways in which faith when hardly pressed can react against this trying environment. One is to recall the fact that, true as the disconcerting phenomena may be, they are not the whole truth. A man's life is one the functions of which can be suspended by an anæsthetic just like those of a dog or a plant: no one can question that. But a man's life is also one which can raise itself to the immortal faith of this Psalm: 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.' This sublime faith in God belongs as much to the realities of human life as the insensibility induced by chloroform. It is not only as true as the other, it is far more true in this sense, that it marks what human nature is when it has really reached its height. This is the self-expression of man when he comes to the full stature of manhood.

¶ Consider how the conscious possession of that higher life in Christ brings with it an absolute incapacity of believing that what men call death can affect it. 'Christ in us' *is* 'the hope of glory.' The true evidence for immortality lies in the deep experience of the Christian spirit. It is when a man can say, 'Thou art the strength of my heart' that the conviction springs up inevitable and triumphant, that such a union can no more be severed by the physical accident of death than a spirit can be wounded by a sword, and that, therefore, he has the right to say further, 'and my portion *for ever*.' [1]

> Could a finite thing, created
> In the bounds of time and space,
> Live and grow and learn to love thee,
> Catch the glory of thy face,
> Fade and die, be gone for ever,
> Have no being, know no place?
>
> No! My soul will not believe it,
> Thou'rt in me, and I in thee;
> I will listen to the message
> That my own soul brings to me,
> Shamed that Faith should ask a token,
> Doubt her own eternity.[1]

[1] *Dr M'Laren of Manchester*, 189.

And the second way to react against sceptical thoughts about immortality is the one which is directly given in the text. When such thoughts press upon us, when the arguments that death ends all seem conclusive and we have nothing to urge against them, let us say to ourselves: If I *yield* to such impressions, I separate myself from the generation of God's children. I become disloyal to the Psalmist and to all who have made his words their own—disloyal to Jesus, and to the faith in which He lived and died—disloyal to the martyrs—disloyal to all who have fallen asleep in Jesus in the sure and blessed hope of a glorious resurrection. Is it nothing to be on the other side in such circumstances? Is it nothing to be aware that the great spirits of our race are on the side we are abandoning? And for whom? Can we appeal to names on the other side that command an equal reverence? No one has ever argued more subtly against immortality than Hume: but what has Hume contributed to the spiritual life of the world that he should be counted an authority at all?

Let us frequent the church, and let the immemorial faith of all saints beget itself in us anew. We need the common faith to sustain our individual faith; we need the consciousness of the children of God in all ages to fortify our belief in His government, His law and His promises. To be at home in the Church is to absorb this strength unconsciously. It is to be delivered from the shallows and miseries of a too narrow experience, and set afloat on the broad stream of Christian conviction which gathers impetus and volume with every generation the saints survive.

[1] Ellen Bibby.

The Danger of Outspoken Doubts

Ps. lxxiii. 15.—'If I had said, I will speak thus; behold, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children' (R.V.).

In the light of the eternal the Psalmist is brought to see things in their true proportions. God is to him now the one indispensable reality, and he is ashamed of his old doubts. To have uttered his doubts in that passing mood had caused incalculable mischief, and he pours out in the text a note of thankfulness that he had been saved from unsettling other lives with doubts and scepticism, above which he himself had now risen victorious. Doubts, he knows, are more easily started than laid to rest. Had he voiced to others his irreverent questionings at the time, had he noised abroad his crude scepticism, he must assuredly have unsettled some tempted, struggling lives.

1. There are times in the life of most when things seem out of joint, when we are tempted to doubt the wisdom, the goodness of God. How apt we are then to confide our doubts and misgivings to others. People are somehow more prone to air their grievances than their blessings; more ready to discuss their doubts than their faiths. The Psalmist reminds us that most lives have trouble enough of their own without our adding ours; that no one knows what harm a doubt may do, once launched into another soul. We may have our doubts and difficulties, yet a doubter is honest only when he does not pose as a doubter, but battles with his doubt, determined to emerge from it to greater certainty of life. No one can live on doubts, and to infect other lives with what is not helpful to ourselves is the basest treachery we can commit against a living soul.

To speak as one feels is said to be honest, but there are certain kinds of feeling for which honesty is no sufficient apology. To say what one thinks is said to be frankness, but there is a kind of thinking that should die in the silence of the brain. To represent things as they really are is said to be the truth, but there is a modern type of realism which is grossly untrue to what is best and highest in human life. There should be more reserve in saying what one feels when that is hurtful to the feelings of others. There is a kind of truth in modern realism which we would do well to suppress when it represents moral eccentricities in life which true manhood and true womanhood would scorn to own. Art, fiction, the press, can read a lesson here. The harm done to-day by the spreading of cheap views of life, the mischief wrought in making public the doings of abnormal creatures who find their way into our courts of law at times; the lasting injury inflicted by serving up in our daily prints minute accounts of all that is criminal, base, diabolical in human nature; the baneful effect of all this upon our generation can never be calculated, never undone. Nothing is more tenacious than a suspicion once begotten, or a doubt once harboured. The young quickly imbibe such doubts and suspicions as to human nature, judging all by the same low standard, expecting in manhood and womanhood little that is noble, disinterested, heroic or divine. Whatever tends to rob us of our belief in the sacredness of human nature is treachery to the best interests of mankind.

'Is doubt a sin?' has been made the subject of more than one famous treatise. To battle with a secret doubt is not sin, but the damage wrought by circulating doubts has never been denied. Anything that undermines the foundations of character, anything that saps life of its moral energy, is a grievous wrong to mankind. Character is undermined when conscience ceases to be the voice of God. Morality becomes a tottering superstructure when the basis of religion begins to shake. The sceptic may be, as he boasts, the independent man; but independence of men's moral welfare, indifference to life's most sacred affinities and possibilities, disregard of men's spiritual birthright, is treachery of the most dangerous kind.

¶ Who can forget the remorse of David Hume at having spoken his doubts on things Divine to his aged mother, and persuaded her to give up her faith in God? When sorrow and affliction came upon her, she found her comforts and her hopes had also fled. Then follow these pathetic words: 'My son, you have taken away my religion; now tell me something to help and comfort me.' He had no substitute to offer.

2. We live in an age of critical inquiry, and a critical age is seldom a reverent age. But

criticism and investigation are now reaching constructive results. What we have to fear is not the investigation of science and criticism, but the crude speculation and half-formed criticism that follow popularly in its wake. Though criticism, when first directed against the written word of God, was negative and unsettling for the uninitiated, its constructive results are now putting to silence the flippant conclusions of destructive criticism. The Bible has nothing to fear from genuine scholarship. If less an object of superstition, it remains more intelligible, more wonderful, more valuable than ever; the text-book of our moral and spiritual life; incomparable for inspiration, reproof or help, encouragement and comfort; profitable in all things, both for the life that now is, and in the hope of that which is to come. If difficulties there be at times, let us keep silence till we have wrestled with God for light upon passages at present meaningless, till some message unseen by the mind grows clear to the soul.

¶ What I urge the clergy to do is to keep all their views as to critical questions out of their sermons; to take the great spiritual and moral truths of the Old and New Testaments, and to build on them as a basis for spiritual and practical teaching. Let them give lectures upon specific subjects and announce them as such, so that those only may come to hear them who feel the need of special teaching; and that there may be no risk of sapping the faith of some when they think they are building up the faith of others. While we avoid no question and suppress no truth, let us more and more be positive in our teaching, and I believe we shall be more and more useful ministers and teachers of the Church of God.[1]

We hear much criticism of the Church to-day and expressions of doubt as to its usefulness. Men ask, What has the Church done? What is the Church doing? They do not ask in the silence of their souls what the world would be to-day without the Church. They question the use of religion, declaring that the Church is producing no practical results. The practical results she produces consist in the development of those moral and spiritual forces which are indispensable to the welfare and the progress of mankind. The Church is not unproductive of practical good in the world, producing a type of influence and a kind of life which count for more in the well-being of mankind than all the merchandise of the East or the commerce of the West. In all worldly criticism and materialistic attacks the Church abides as the storehouse of influences and inspirations for the life of man, the highest, the fairest, the wholesomest, the best.

But whatever questions men may ask regarding God, the Bible, the Church, none but the most brutalized of mankind has ever questioned the supreme, the wondrous work of Jesus Christ for the world. Beyond all theories and explanations, beyond all philosophies and criticisms, the Christ remains a sublime, undeniable fact for the lives of men, answering in some way our deepest needs, inspiring our highest hopes and ennobling all human life.

¶ Amiel writes in his Journal: 'We may hold aloof from the Churches and yet bow ourselves before Jesus. We may be suspicious of the clergy and refuse to have anything to do with catechisms, and yet love the Holy and the Just, who came to save and not to curse. Jesus will always supply us with the best criticism of Christianity, and when Christianity has passed away the religion of Jesus will survive.'

Who will ever reckon up all that the beauty and holiness of that life has represented in human lives! Who will ever tell what hardness of life His wondrous charity has softened; what burdens of soul his love has eased! What were the world without Gethsemane, and that Crown of Thorns hallowing the great human brotherhood of suffering, trial and sorrow! What were existence for us without that mystery of the Cross where man beholds manifest in time the great heartache of eternal love, and learns the infinite value of the human soul! Who will give up the vision gained beside that empty tomb of Easter, that death does not lead man at his grandest to the grave! In face of the Cross the real superstition is seen to be not believing too much to-day, but believing too little.

Let us go out, then, to live our life, doubting our doubts, believing our faiths, trusting our hopes, putting to the test in our daily lives the great fact of Christ. Great souls have in the past doubted, and their vanquished doubts only served to deepen the foundations of their faith, and broaden their outlook. What the world needs to hear to-day is more of her faiths, more

[1] *Bishop Moorhouse*, 151.

of her hopes, more of encouragement and cheer, and with the Christ before us in the path of life faith comes back, and hope amid sorrows, help amid weakness, and pardon amid failure. These we will give to the world.

Life Interpreted by Faith

Ps. lxxiii. 17.—'Until I went into the sanctuary.'

This is one of the very great psalms because it deals with great things. As always is the case when you are dealing with a big psalm, you get the conclusion at the outset, you get what the whole thing is about at the beginning. Think, for example, of the Twenty-third Psalm. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' That is how the Psalm begins—with a conclusion. Then the Psalmist proceeds to give the process by which he arrives at that conclusion. We must admit, however, that there are great psalms that do not arrive at any conclusion, and these are amongst the very greatest psalms in the Word of God. We see a poor soul tossing himself on his pillow and heaving about on his bed in distress of mind, and at the end of the psalm he does not see one inch farther into the darkness than when he began. Why are some of these among the greatest and deepest psalms in the Bible? Do you remember Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* describing that wonderful Abbé, that most Christlike figure almost in all literature? Victor Hugo says this about him: 'He was one of those men who could sit beside a man'—the man had just lost his young wife—'for a whole hour and say nothing.' Now, in those great psalms we see God listening, sitting beside us when we are wild and angry and unfair, listening. He could answer us if He cared, as He answered Job; but He knows that the deepest wounds do not heal except in their own blood, and the wounds of the soul never heal except in the expression of themselves to God. And so He allows us to talk, saying our wild, devastating things, that He could answer, which later on we shall be ashamed of; but He allows us to go on saying them, knowing that all expression is a relief, and that thereby we rid our souls of very perilous stuff.

Here is a Psalm that reaches a conclusion, and the conclusion we find at the very outset. The conclusion is a confession. It begins: 'Truly God is good to Israel.' The man is rebuking himself for having thought otherwise. And then he proceeds to tell us how he himself had been to blame. 'As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.' The Psalm, that is to say, begins with a confession by a man that he very nearly did something which he thanks God he did not do; that he was on the point of going over a precipice of some kind, and that something occurred to keep him back from its dizzy edge.

¶ I remember long ago being in the Isle of Rousay in the Orkneys, which, like all the islands of the western sea, stands up sheer out of the ocean like a kind of table. On the side that faces the Atlantic, the Island of Rousay is precipitous. It is being eaten into by the sea, and in course of time it collapses bit by bit. When you are on the level of the water looking landwards you can see great galleries receding away into the heart of the island, while all around you

> The ceaseless billows on the ocean's breast
> Break like a bursting heart and die in foam,
> And thus at last find peace.

Walking across Rousay, you come across slits and cracks, some only a foot wide, some a yard wide, some ten yards wide, and some great gaps and chasms. The dangerous ones, obviously, are the narrow ones. Nobody thinks of trying to leap a ten-yard chasm, but many of us think we are able to leap a chasm about a foot wide. That is where the danger lies. If you look over the edge of such a chasm or slit you see the water writhing and wriggling away down beneath. Now, supposing a man almost slipped, almost missed his footing, but fell upon the other side, safe, just escaped. What an agony of happiness would be in that man's heart! And if as he rose he rested for a moment on his knees, and if he bethought himself of a psalm like this, surely he could get no better expression for his mood than this: 'My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.'[1]

1. What was it this man so narrowly escaped? If a man were to meet us and tell us with a glowing countenance, 'Truly God is good, for my feet had well-nigh slipped'—if a man were to say that to us, we should conclude at once

[1] John A. Hutton.

that what the man was referring to was some particular breach of a command, some public transgression which he very nearly committed; that he had felt the hot breath of some seduction for one awful moment, and that just when he was about to give himself away something happened to send him back on to the side of decency. That is what we should conclude. That is, in a sense, what the Psalm is about. This good man is thanking God, not because he very nearly did something which he did not do, but because he very nearly said something, and he thanks God he never said it. He tells us, indeed, that he thought the thing but he did not say it.

What was it he thought? Here it is in a word. He very nearly lost his faith. He very nearly said that life was a senseless, a rotten thing. He tells us how it happened, and it is how it always happens. He saw what we call the inequalities of life; he saw some people, as he thought, unscrupulous, who, in the language of the world, had prospered amazingly. He saw some other people who, as the result of their own sacrifice, had not succeeded in the eyes of the world. As he thinks about those people who had prospered he begins to get more and more angry, and he becomes more and more unjust. He describes them as only a very angry man could describe them; that is to say, with great literary effect; he describes them so that we can see them. He speaks about violence covering them as a garment, and their eyes standing out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. 'They speak loftily'; they do not see the immediate thing, they just see away in front; they do not need to look at the immediate thing. If anyone says, 'Yes, but what about God?' they say, 'God? what does God know about it?' Then they begin to talk science and philosophy, about the myriad stars, or the millions of years it took to lay the old red sandstone. We do not know for a little while what they are at, but it is just an attempt to browbeat us, simple people, out of our faith. Their idea is that God is such a wonderful Being, dealing with such wonderful things, so infinite, that He cannot be expected really to know or to care anything about men. Satan transformed into an angel of light, Satan talking philosophy and theology with a view to destroying our belief in God's particular providence. So they say, 'How doth God know?' or, as the English Prayer Book version of the psalms has it, 'Tush, how should God perceive it?'

This Psalmist tells us the thing got so bad with him that he felt that if he kept his eye on these inequalities, and these prosperous bad people, he would really lose his faith. Whereupon he did a wonderful thing—he ran into the church. There he sat in a corner, and as he sat he thought these thoughts. We do not know what he saw in the church. For all churches that have been real churches have tried to mean the same thing, both before Christ and after; they have tried to deal, with respect, with the tragic movements of the human soul. He may have seen some old saint engaged in prayer, or he may have heard from some word of Holy Scripture the story of the faithful men of old who had suffered and who would not abandon their faith. Or, on that day, he may have seen some mothers in Israel bringing their little children on the eighth day to be dedicated to the Lord. And as he saw these simple women holding up their little babies, declaring their belief in God, something went soft within him, and he remembered that once upon a time his mother, who, perhaps, was now in another land, had held him up and dedicated him to God. At any rate, this good man suddenly saw the whole thing. He said, I would rather be wrong with these people—that old saint in prayer, and those Hebrew mothers holding up their babes to God and pledging thus that no matter what diseases their little children might have and what suffering, or how these little children might later on break their hearts, they would be mothers to them to the end—I would rather be wrong with all these than right with those outside.

2. Now our faith is a vote. Our faith in Christ is a vote for Him. There is a great deal of religion in voting. We do it in the shabbiest possible way, but it might be done in a wonderful way. But in spite of the shabby circumstances in which our voting now takes place—the unplaned white wood, the cheap jute, the cheap pencil, the string, and all the degrading incidents of an election—in spite of these things, for those who have eyes to see there is still something great and solemn in recording a vote. After all, there is a moment when we are left alone, and there is the piece of paper, and

there are the two names representing conflicting views of life. For there can only really, at all times, be two authentic parties in any State, and if ever there are more than two it is the result of loose thinking on the part of those who belong to these parties. There is only an 'either' or an 'or' in most great moments of life. There are the two names representing conflicting views of life, and we put our cross opposite the name which we believe represents a view of life nearer to the mind of God, and we signify our adhesion by the sign of the cross, namely, that that is a view of life for which, if called upon, we are prepared to lay down our life. That is our vote, our faith.

¶ Doddridge gives this advice: 'Set your hand and seal to it that on such a day of such a month and year and at such a place, on full consideration and serious reflection, you came to this happy resolution, that whatever others might do, you would serve the Lord.'

Here is this universe capable of all sorts of interpretations. There is a great deal to be said for the view that there is nothing in life but what we see. There is so much to be said for the disheartening view of life, that God sent His Son into the world in order to tilt the balance to the side of faith. We vote for the great view. We can have any universe we like. If we vote for the view that there is nothing in life, verily we are that kind of man; but if we vote for the view that life is sacred—a sacred thing, a thing in which the fine view is always being threatened, and therefore needing people who will lay down their lives for it, and die for it, then we are on the side of the sufferers and the saints, and on the side of Christ.

'What think ye of Christ,' friend? when all's done and said,
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can? [1]

The Abiding Presence

Ps. lxxiii. 23.—'Nevertheless I am continually with thee.'

THERE are some words, as is often said, that speak volumes. No book is so full of them as the Bible. And one of these is the word 'Nevertheless.' It generally means that the man who uses it is standing up against things, arguments, fears, difficulties, which can be met in no other way but by standing, and, as Paul puts it, having done all, continuing still to stand. The word 'nevertheless' in the Scriptures is generally a preface to something the man did or said or confessed in the name of God against the overwhelming tyranny of things, or the tempting or teasing voice of the world. When the world, the flesh, and the devil in some form or another have done their worst, and their would-be victim quietly rises and says 'nevertheless,' we know he has won a spiritual victory—the characteristic spiritual victory which is just to stand for faith and for the way of faith when all the currents which generally move people are running the other way.

This Seventy-third Psalm tells the story of how a man nearly gave way, but recovered himself in time and fell back on God. He had all but lost belief in God's goodness and justice as he gazed with envy on the prosperity and influence of the wicked. He was tempted to think that all his endeavours after righteousness had been worse than wasted labour, for they had only brought him suffering. He felt that to proclaim such a view of life would have been an act of treachery to the little community of faithful souls around him, but the more he pondered the problem the more difficult did it seem. And then he thought of the Temple. 'I went into the sanctuary of God,' he says, and there he recovered himself just in time. For there God drew near to him, and he felt His nearness. His experience of God's love and care renewed itself in his soul, and he was himself again. Gradually the mood of faith and hope reasserted itself against all the threatening voices of doubt and despair and temptation. Let them do their worst! At their worst he had something which was stronger and truer than they. 'Nevertheless,' he cried, 'I am continually with thee! Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in the heavens but thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee. God is the strength of my life and my portion forever.'

It was the victory of religious experience. The simplest statement of religious experience

[1] Browning.

is just this, to be able to say, 'I am continually with thee.' It is to know ourselves in the shadow of God's love and care, to know, as Paul says, that nothing can separate us from the love of God; that wherever we go we are in the sure grasp of a love which will not let us go, but will guide us and provide for us and give us strength to carry on, and will see us through at last to the great end of our being. To know ourselves with God, to be sure of His love—that is religion.

Lord, Thou art mine! What matters aught beside?
If Thou with me abide.
I shall be satisfied.

Have I not all, O Lord, possessing Thee?
Behold, in Thee I see
All Good stored up for me.

Do what Thou wilt, I can but trust Thee still:
Work out Thy perfect will;
Thine own desire fulfil—

For Thou art mine, and there is none beside:
If Thou with me abide,
I shall be satisfied.[1]

How that assurance springs up in us it is difficult to say. God has so many ways of making our hearts ring to the music of His love. The late Sir Ernest Shackleton describes how on a long trek through a dismal frozen country he had the indescribable feeling, which was shared by his companions, that there was someone else in the party—'the great Presence, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns and the round ocean and the living air, and breathes through all things.' 'Nevertheless,' they might have said of all their hardships, 'we are still with Thee.' But it does not take the exceptional moments or the great crises of life to awaken that experience, though these may heighten it. To know we are with Him is to be sure of a love which is constant amid all our inconstancy, whose influence on us is deeper than mere pleasure or pain, a love which is intimate to ourselves and to our individual need, somehow singling us out while not excluding any other from that same care and guiding.

¶ George Eliot describes in *Romola* how, fleeing from the city in her troubles, the desolate woman meets Savonarola, who recognizes her though she is disguised. His glance produced a wonderful impression on her of interest in her and care for her, expressing itself in a strongly felt bond.

Let us look at some of the things over which this deeply wrought experience of God was able to give this man the victory.

1. It was the answer to the shame and regret which his own disloyalty had left with him. He had been thinking hard things about God, though he had not come to the point of acting on them. For the moment he had forgotten the gracious providences, the answers to prayer, the sudden and sure enlightenment which had often come into his soul from God in days gone by, and made him sure that God was with him, and he was with God. He had forgotten these things listening to the arguments of his own despair, and now he reproaches himself for it all. He feels like a man who has been on the point of failing a great friend in the moment of temptation. And his heart is sore about it. 'So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was as a beast before thee,' a creature without intelligence and heart and conscience, without capacity for God's great fellowship. For a moment he was like Bunyan's pilgrim in the very Slough of Despond; for there is a despondency that comes to a sensitive mind when it takes to searching itself in the light of God. But out of this despondency he knows the secret of victory. 'Nevertheless, I am continually with thee.' The grace of God abides. The love that overshadows us and has wrought itself into our very nature does not change. Nay, the light by which we see ourselves is the secret of the shadow which falls upon our hearts.

It is a great thing to know how to recover ourselves from this mood of despondency that comes from the shock of our own failure, or the bitter sense of our own deficiencies. People to-day are not greatly given to this introspection. It is supposed to be a morbid thing, and so it is, if we do not know the right way out of it. It may sap our strength and spoil our work. Some people would escape from it by fleeing from it into the bustle and surface happiness of life. That is a wrong way. The true way out is the way in, further in, nearer to the light that rebukes, till we realize that it is the light of a great love in which all our failings and falls are

[1] E. H. Divall, *A Believer's Rest*, 8.

swallowed up in a constant mighty stream of forgiveness that searches and yet cleanses, that judges and yet restores, and lifts us to our feet again.

2. In this experience there is victory over the glamour of outward success and outward prosperity, which tempts us to think that in missing them we are missing the best.

This man looked at those who were rich and unscrupulous, and he thought for a moment, 'What a fool I am! Here I am taking the way of righteousness and missing everything! Am I not losing the real worth of life, turning my back on these things? Is it not better after all for a man to

Take the cash and let the credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of the distant drum?

Who is to prove that this sensitiveness to conscience is not a morbid scruple which has no relation to any world that exists, and that in obeying it we are not missing the real world?

There lay this man's temptation. What is the answer to it? Is there any answer to it except the faith that looks ahead and comforts itself with what is waiting when the balance is redressed at the hands of God? Is there any other answer but Browning's hope:

I know there shall dawn a day.
Is it here on homely earth,
Is it yonder, worlds away,
That Power comes full in play?

Yes, there is another answer. It is the answer of religious experience; 'Nevertheless I am still with thee.' The secret of real satisfaction is not what a man has: it is what a man is. It is not in the possession of external things; it is in what he possesses within—the secret treasure of peace, and joy, and power for life, which spring from communion with God. The man who knows the love of God has everything. He is dwelling at the sources of happiness. He has the solid satisfactions which endure. He has the substance—the other has the shadow. He has the reality—the other has only the appearance.

¶ James Smetham's painting, poetry, and study of literature did not lead to conventional success; yet toward the end of life he wrote: 'In my own secret heart I look on myself as one who *has* got on, and got to his goal, as one who has got something a thousand times better than a fortune, more real, more inward, less in the power of others, less variable, more immortal, more eternal; as one whose feet are on a rock, his goings established, with a new song in his mouth, and joy on his head.' [1]

3. This experience is the victory over the coming dissolution of all things. That was what the Psalmist saw in the sanctuary of God. He saw the latter end of these successful materialists. Their triumph was merely temporary. As a dream when one awaketh, some day there would come an end of it all. Their satisfactions would perish. They were of the earth earthy, and when Nature failed and the last shadow fell upon their little day, even though there should be no sudden reversal of fortune, where would they be? He shudders at the prospect. 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'—that is the last word for them.

We live in a world where material things go back to their elements. Corruption is always at work stripping off the husks, and if a man's life were only husk, what would be left for him? But what of himself in this coming dissolution? 'Nevertheless, I am still with thee.' Was this man sure of immortality, of a resurrection? We cannot say that, for he lived in a time when the idea of a resurrection had hardly risen to the surface. But at least he had hold of the reality out of which the doctrine of the resurrection grows like the leaf upon the tree. He would be in God's hands, and in these hands he was safe.

The victory over the thought of death and the decay of things is a victory of spiritual experience. It is the victory of a faith that knows little of details, but knows at least that in God's love we have a fellowship that is eternal. The whole faith in immortality is there. There is our peace, not that we know anything definite, but that we know the love that holds us, and with that we can rest content. We can lie down in peace. Our little boat cannot sink in this great ocean of life, which in reality is an ocean of love.

¶ The story is told of a mother who lost three sons during the War. One after another the

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Ashes of Roses*, 197.

blows fell. When the last one died they feared for her reason, and tremblingly went to comfort her. To their surprise they found her quietly serene, looking at them with a calm face.

'I shall sleep to-night,' she said. 'I know where they are.' [1]

The Length and Shortness of Life

Ps. lxxiii. 24.—'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me with glory.'

A KEEN sense of the fleeting nature of our mortal life is usually thought to trouble only morbidly religious minds. Sensible people, it is assumed, will relegate the subject to their death-beds. But, to ensure success in this forgetfulness, it is even more necessary to lack imagination than to lack religion.

It is not by accident that, in the Old Testament, the transitoriness of life is set forth in vivid figure and poetic language. To the Wise Woman of Tekoa we are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again; to the Psalmist we are as grass which flourishes at morning and at even is cut down and withers; to the Prophet we are as leaves in an autumn wood being whirled down by the wind of our iniquity. These are not the dull platitudes of lugubrious piety, but the imaginative insight of poetic souls.

What dulls the sense of all things hastening to decay is not wisdom and strength of mind, but routine and forgetfulness. From them faith and imagination alike awake us. It is not the mere sense that 'our moments hasten toward their end,' but the vision of time's measureless possibilities makes life seem so short. Till we first realize its greatness, we cannot fully realize its smallness. In a sense it must be long before it is short. Poetry says to our hearts, 'Thus passes the glory of the world,' by causing us to realize 'what a piece of work is man,' how supreme in faculty, how exalted in interest, how measureless in possibility, how vast in spiritual possessions of truth and beauty, and not by turning our thoughts to the 'bubble reputation' and the tinsel show of place and possession. Similarly the sense of the shortness of life is not religious at all unless we first realize how long it is, measured by the possibilities of good, and still more, by the possibilities of choosing wrong and working evil. Hence our first religious need is security for its length, not its brevity, for achieving its true uses, not for meeting even its near and certain end.

[1] James Reid.

1. Our first need is *security in view of the length of life.* 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.'

The need of such security life and his own foolish thoughts about it had taught the Psalmist. He had seen the wicked live in arrogance and die at ease, and he had suffered and seen others suffer under their oppression, till he doubted whether God cared, and whether it was not vain to keep the hands clean and the heart pure.

As he believed in another life, we might have expected him to turn to the easy solution that eternity would redress the unjust balance of time. Some have even rested their whole hope of immortality on this seemingly necessary inference from God's righteousness. Yet he did not so much as glance at this facile transference of the problem of God's rule to an unknown future. Nor, what is more, did any prophet. For that there are at least two good reasons: one, that the prophet never ceased to seek to see the 'goodness of the Lord in the land of the living'; the other, that he never ceased to live a life not measured by reward either in time or in eternity. In short, this solution was not adequate either to his faith or to his morals. Laws enforced by rewards and penalties like a criminal code were not for the prophet the thoughts of God, which are as high above our thoughts as the heavens above the earth; nor was doing good for the sake even of everlasting happiness what he understood by God's righteousness. Otherworldliness may be a more prudent foresight, but it has no more purity of motive than worldliness. Man is not truly good if he does good not for its own sake, but for ulterior reward: and God is not truly good if He has wholly postponed the principles of His government to the world to come.

¶ To ask to see some fruit of our endeavour is but a transcendental way of serving for reward; and what we take to be contempt of self is only greed of hire.[1]

When half inclined to envy the prosperous, two things helped the Psalmist—God's children and God's sanctuary. He looked on good men and saw that they enjoyed a portion they would

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *A Christmas Sermon.*

not exchange for any fortune, power, or pride of place. Then he went into the sanctuary and lifted up his heart to God, till the veil was removed from his own soul and he saw man's true blessings through God's large and gracious purpose. Then all his estimates of life's good were changed, so that he would not have been of the ungodly to gain the whole world. Then he knew that there was no greater need in life than guidance to chose none of their ways.

Thus he made the great discovery that God's guidance is not by laws which approve themselves by making us prosperous, but by counsel which to accept as our own is itself blessedness. Laws are externally imposed, and are obeyed, not for their own sake, but for the rewards and punishments attached to them. But counsel we follow only as we make it our own; and we make it our own only as we see it to be in accord with the nature of things as they really are. God's counsel standeth forever, because it is in accord with the way He has actually made the world and the soul of man to use it, and because it embodies a purpose we never can exhaust. Yet counsel is counsel only when freely given and freely received. Hence it is possible to 'contemn the counsel of the Most High,' just because it is counsel and not law. But, as it is identical with the nature of God's reality, the rejection of it must be a greater disaster than the breaking of any law. No punishment can be so calamitous as to have all God's working necessarily against us. To think otherwise is to live in a dream, which, being based on unreality, will be short, and suddenly and terribly broken.

Did the Psalmist change his belief that the righteous might have a full cup of bitterness? His discovery did not alter his opinion, but, seeing it with different eyes, he found in it a different meaning. Possibly he had been thinking specially of Jeremiah, the prototype of the Servant of the Lord, his message despised, his sincerity rewarded by the stocks and the lash, his devotion to his people's good restrained in a dungeon. But, though poor, despised, misrepresented, how right was Jeremiah when others were wrong, how loyal when others were false, how steadfast when others were dismayed! What treasures of the heart, what peace in the unwavering choice of good, what service of a man's noblest hopes, what revelation of God's mind, and of the blessed world when He shall have written His counsel on human hearts! What a contrast in security to strutting on the stage of life dressed in a little brief authority of which death makes mockery, and pampering the body which is to feed the worms!

2. Our second need is *security in view of the brevity of life.* 'And afterward receive me with glory.'

It is often said that there is no trace of any hope of immortality in the early writings of the Old Testament and even that it does not appear at all till after the Exile. We must not, however, assume that at an earlier date the soul was thought to have no continuance, but to suffer dissolution with the body. The kind of survival now maintained by spiritualism has always been held by primitive peoples, and the more certainly the more primitive they were. In ancient Israel departed souls were thought to go down to Sheol, which did not mean the grave, but a place in the underworld. There they lived a shadowy existence; yet they had knowledge, especially of the future, not given to the living, and could return at times to communicate it, as Samuel to Saul. There were persons who were believed to have familiar spirits just like some in our day, and there was a class who made a profession of appealing to the dead on behalf of the living, who would now be called mediums. There are people among us who are convinced that, if such a type of continuance after death could be established, a scientific proof of immortality would be provided. But it rather appears as if the prophets were right in regarding that kind of interest in the dead as merely a hindrance.

¶ The whole course of our true progress in life consists in advancing from material to spiritual things; in learning that man does not live by bread alone, etc.; and in the course of this progress we come increasingly to see that spirituality is only attained by the sacrifice of the material side of things, that is, bodily indulgence, visible manifestation, material expression of every kind. Now death is the climax of all this process. Its whole point (so to say) is to withdraw us from the last lingering elements of material, to wholly spiritual, union; to teach us that our true union with those we love best can only be really reached by a common life in God.

Consequently the attempt to counterwork

this process, and re-establish that material communication which God has broken precisely in order to spiritualize it, is wholly irreligious. It is called spiritualism, but is in fact materialism: an attempt to return to what St Paul calls 'carnal,' and keeps us back, if anything, from that attempt to secure true union with our beloved dead, by really spiritual means, namely by a complete life in God.[1]

¶ The moment we are asked to accept 'scientific evidence' for spiritual truth, the alleged spiritual truth becomes for us neither spiritual nor true. It is degraded into an event in the phenomenal world, and when so degraded it cannot be substantiated. Psychical research is trying to prove that eternal values are temporal facts, which they can never be.[2]

At all events Israel's true hope of immortality came in quite another way. It came by the discovery of a glory in this life, fleeting as it is, vast enough to overflow the bounds of earthly existence, and enduring enough to belong not to time but to eternity. In short, it came entirely through men like Jeremiah, who sought nothing whatsoever except to know the counsel of God and to be wholly guided by it. They no more lived for eternal reward than for temporal. But, as they stood for causes which could not perish, were guided by principles which could not alter, and saw visions of a Divine purpose which could not fade, it became unthinkable that, having so lived in things unseen and eternal, they should themselves belong only to things seen and temporal. Like all God's best gifts, the hope of immortality was not found by seeking it, but it came of itself, as our text says, after seeking only to follow God's counsel. 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward,' and only afterward, 'receive me with glory.'

Jesus Christ has for us brought life and immortality to light in the good news, in comparison with which its manifestation, by Jeremiah or even by the whole generation of God's children, is only as the shadow to the sunshine. But, when this is made an isolated matter of the Resurrection, it is no more than the old material basis which had so little value; and it runs counter to our Lord's own saying that neither would men be persuaded though one rose from the dead. The Resurrection is of value as it shows that it was not possible that One who alone walked perfectly in the whole counsel of God should be holden of death.

The emphasis is always on the Cross, which Jesus also conceived as a cup, the full cup into which was wrung out all the bitterness of outward defeat, scorn, agony, death, and the sense of being hated of man and even of being forsaken of God. But it was also the supreme fulfilment of all righteousness, because, in face of every pleasure which could bribe or terror which could dismay, and against every counsel of fear or prudence, it marks an utter trust in the counsel of God for guidance in all conceivable circumstances. Not till we see in this perfect service the glory of a love unconquerable, in the power of which we too may now live victoriously, can we rest on it a hope for another life in the assurance that neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

[1] *The Life and Work of J. R. Illingworth, D.D.*, 249.
[2] W. R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, 269.

The Passion for God

Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26.—'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'

Though national to the core, and fitted for the Temple-worship of a people, yet the Psalms were originally the outcome of intensely personal emotion and experience. It is this, indeed, which gives them their peculiar and permanent value. They grasp God as a personal and proved possession. Few of our modern hymns grasp Him with the same intensity. Their writers are not only seeking after God, they have found Him. They do not cry, 'O God!' in mere recognition or even adoration; but, 'O God, thou art my God'—a cry which gives expression not merely to thought or hope, but to a reality in process of fulfilment; and a cry also which illustrates the difference between belief and faith, between philosophy and religion.

The religion we need is the religion we can experience—the truth which is not bound up with outside things, but which enters the soul through experience. And amid the strong, swift, and manifold drift in these days toward all that is corporate and collective in life we must not suffer ourselves, or suffer others, to forget or slight the personal side and root of religion. For it is that out of which the rest

comes—not only our individual power for service and sacrifice, but all the noblest issues of life: all that is strongest and best in our corporate life and work.

The profound sense of relationship to God which we find everywhere in the Book of Psalms reaches its highest expression in the great words of the text: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' This is not the pathos of passionate yearning, but the language of satisfaction and assurance. It is the utterance of a man seeking not God's gifts, but God Himself; a man of whom it may be truly said that his religion—that is, his communion with God—is the deepest of his personal relations. He and God are inseparable. He cannot live without God; and he has somehow reached the assurance that God cannot live without him. Human affection, and the ties of kindred and friendship, are not strong enough to hold him down. The upper regions are to his Oriental eyes filled with angels, but his soul refuses even to linger in their radiant company. All that is created he passes by in his aspiration after the Creator.

1. The passion for God, which finds immortal expression in our text, is the inmost heart of religion. The test, therefore, to which every form of religion ought to be submitted is this: Does it tend to produce, to quicken, to nourish, to strengthen, to purify and direct aright this passion for God, those religious desires and emotions—reverence, awe, gratitude, repentance, trust, submission, the longing for truth and beauty and goodness—which find their crowning and complete expression in the devotion of the whole being and life to God? If it does that, and in proportion as it does that, it is true religion.

But we can hardly read the Psalms thoughtfully without asking ourselves: 'Have we not lost something out of our religion, both in its individual and in its collective form?' What a sense these old Hebrews had of God! What reverence, what passionate desire and devotion! Who now seeks with all his mind and heart for real intimacy with God? It is surely strange that we, who live in the full light of the day of Christ, should only be able with difficulty, and not without some sense of unreality, to appropriate to ourselves the hopes and prayers, and thanksgivings of the saints of Israel.

It has been said, somewhat irreverently, that men do not so much worship God, as use Him; and there is truth in the charge. St Bernard used to say that a man begins to move toward Christian perfection when he begins to care for himself for the sake of God. But how few of us care for ourselves in this high way—seeking to develop and train our powers just in order that we may lay a more complete and finished sacrifice upon the altar of God's will and service! Even when we look forward to heaven, it is not the nearer presence and full enjoyment of God which we expect and think most about, but the cessation of mortal care and strife, or reunion with earthly friends. How few can enter into the frame of mind of the Arabian mystic who prayed: 'If I worship Thee, O God, for fear of hell, send me to hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of heaven, deny me heaven; but if I worship Thee for Thyself, withhold not from me the Eternal Beauty.'

Not Thy gifts I seek, O Lord;
Not Thy gifts, but Thee.
What were all Thy boundless store
Without Thyself? what less or more?
Not Thy gifts, but Thee.

2. In much of the religious devotion of Christendom, the ancient passion for God—the Infinite and Eternal God—has given place to the passion for the Son of God. In many churches and religious assemblies the whole worship often appears to centre in the Son, as though there were no God the Father beyond Him. Not long before he died, Bishop Westcott complained of 'the growing tendency on all sides in popular forms of worship to put into the background the glory and love of the Father.' We have only to read carefully many modern books of prayers and hymns to find out how much God is identified almost exclusively with Jesus. We must not let even our devotion to the Son of God take the place of the passion for God. For to do this would be really to separate ourselves from the Son who came out from God, and came into the world, not to seek His own but His Father's glory, not to bring us to Himself but to God. We must not stop short of the God whom Jesus revealed. 'Back to Jesus' really means 'Back to God.' It is His work in the world to bear

all things on to that single and simple majesty of dominion when 'God shall be all in all'—and 'all in all' to the souls of all His children.

3. For many years now we have witnessed outside the churches great efforts to make the ethical or humanitarian passion take the place and do the work of the passion for God. We have been exhorted to let the passion for God give place to the passion for truth, for goodness, for justice, for brotherhood, for humanity. Even in the churches themselves we have seen in recent years a tendency to make more of work than of worship; more of church halls, with their enlarged provisions for secular activities, than of church altars; more of speeches and addresses on social subjects than of sermons which deal directly with God and the soul. This state of things belongs, of course, to a period of reaction. But there is no need to choose between devotion to God and devotion to humanity. Our devotion to God includes, while it transcends, devotion to humanity. Every step we take nearer God takes us deeper into the human fellowship. What God did in Christ is the revelation and symbol of what He is doing always, and everywhere. And is it not a fact that the men who have most helped the world have been—the great majority of them—men whose passion for God has inspired and fired them with a passion for humanity?

¶ Look at the men and women, in the nineteenth century for instance, and in our own land, who did most for the betterment of their fellows. Think, for example, of Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, of Elizabeth Fry and General Booth, to say nothing of scientists like Pasteur and Lister, or divines like Kingsley and Westcott. What is the outstanding feature of their characters? Precisely this, that they lived in humble contact with God. To them God was more real than anyone or anything else. They believed in an eternal life, and in consequence they were all out for the uplift of their fellows in this one. We have foolishly imagined that by leaving out God and the fear of God we could more easily get on with the work of reforming the world. Whereas literally our only chance of progress is to restore the sense of God; the valuation which sees life in the vista of eternity. The plant can no more dispense with the sun, nor the cathedral with its foundations.[1]

[1] F. T. Woods, in *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach.*

4. Now, such a great utterance as our text—'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee'—is not the record of a unique or exceptional experience or inspiration possible only to mediæval saints like St Francis of Assisi, who spent many a long night, from dark to dawn, in prayer, using no words save this one phrase: 'My God, Thou art my all'; or to modern saints like Wilberforce and Gladstone, who used to repeat the Psalms to themselves on the way to the House of Commons; rather does it set forth the feeling that may and ought to be cherished by every man towards the God with whom he has to do. It is not the forcing of our human instincts and affections into an unnatural channel; on the contrary, it is their natural and normal outcome and fulfilment. The truth is, there are slumbering in us all those desires and cravings and aspirations which the language of the Psalms interprets and expresses. The man in whom they are absent or feeble has either an undeveloped or a stifled soul. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength'—that is the true harmony of life.

Let us put ourselves under the influences which most quicken and strengthen the passion of devotion to Him in whom we 'live, and move, and have our being.' It is told of a distinguished astronomer that he could spend a whole night, unconscious of time, gazing at some remarkable phenomenon in the heavens. And those who have the best right to tell us, say that the secret of the Divine joy lies in holding frequent communion with God. It does not come by one flash of light, or by one great convulsive experience, but gradually, step by step, by regular acts of devotion, by meditation, contemplation, prayer, and obedience; without haste and without rest, in the steady and continuous living of our life with God.

Nearness to God

Ps. lxxiii. 28.—'But it is good for me to draw near to God.'

'But as for me, approach to God, nearness to God, for me is good.' The whole stress of the sentence lies upon the individual and independent decision. Let other people, let the whole world, if it will, retire into a distance from God,

and live apart and to themselves. *My* choice is made, definite, irrevocable, and, above all, my own. To approach God, to abide close to God, face to Face, spirit to Spirit, love to Love, person to Person—this for me is good.

1. Who does not know that strong and manifold drifts of opinion around us set towards all that is corporate and collective? They touch and draw us, like the secret currents of the ocean, in every kind of connection, social, civil, and religious. In religion the tendency is everywhere. Here and there the teacher lays his insistence upon collective 'humanity,' as the object of redemption. In humanity he sees the developing manifestation of God, who inbreathes and informs it with His Spirit. The term sounds on perpetually through such teaching, like the theme of a fugue. We are occupied and impressed with the life and growth of humanity, its liberation from evil, its education into advancing stages of good. The tendency is to apply to it the whole Biblical vocabulary of salvation, from the first purpose of eternal mercy to the glory that is to be revealed.

'The Kingdom of God,' again, is a term characteristic of whole types of influential thought; for instance that of the school of Ritschl. It is a term wholly Scriptural; its true significance therefore is altogether for the highest good. But the risk is, a use of it ruled not by Scripture but by speculation. As a fact, it has been used largely to promote conceptions of man's relation to God under which the individual sinks and is merged in 'the Kingdom.' He must seek his blessings, if he is to be blest, only as he lives in its life, only through its large mediation.

In other quarters (though all these types of thought often cross each other's borders) the great word 'Church' is made the resonant theme of all the music. No matter, for the moment, what definition in detail is given to the word; it denotes a sacred society, corporate and collective. The idea of such an august entity fairly rules whole theologies, and meets us at all turns. So presented, the Church as such is the true object and recipient of salvation, the seer, the teacher, of its message. It is the avenue to Christ, the shrine; the way to Christ, the end. Indeed, in its collectivity, it is so joined to Him, so filled, so impregnated with Him, that we cannot as individuals touch Him with a sure touch except through it; scarcely, on the other hand, can we touch it without therefore touching Him.

2. The tendencies thus indicated carry in them powerful elements of truth. Mere individualism, if it means the individual's isolation into self-sufficiency and self-will, is indeed a fatal fallacy. Alike for him and for all that is about him it is simply evil. As surely as the man was constituted not for himself but for God, so surely was he constituted not for himself but for others. So conscience intimates; so Revelation affirms. 'Glorious things are spoken' of the Church of Christ. In the Epistles the words labour with the effort to express its excellency. It is the Body of the exalted Head, the organ for His operation. It is the object of His Divine love and sacrifice, nourished and cherished, and, at last, glorified by Him.

Great, indeed, is the place and function of the Church. But that place is not between the soul and the Redeemer. It is in the stress it has laid upon that truth that the Protestant principle has done one of its noblest services to the world. There are those who misread Protestantism as if it were only negative, only destructive—a mistake only possible by defect of knowledge. It is this view of things that gives stuff and fibre to character, personal and national, wherever it prevails.

¶ 'Comte,' says J. S. Mill, 'misses one of the most important facts connected with Protestantism—its remarkable efficacy, as contrasted with Catholicism' (he means Romanism), 'in cultivating the intelligence and the conscience of the individual believer. The feeling of a direct responsibility of the individual immediately to God is almost wholly a creation of Protestantism. Even when Protestants were nearly as persecuting as Catholics (quite as much so they never were), still they maintained that the true belief was not to be accepted from a priest, but to be sought and found by the believer; and that no one could answer to God for him; he must answer for himself.'

¶ When he was at school in Magdeburg, Martin Luther saw a picture which troubled him for years. It represented a ship, in which no emperor or king or ordinary man or woman had a place, none but the Pope and his cardinals and bishops and monks; and over them the Holy Ghost hovered, and they voyaged heavenward. The laymen struggled in the sea: the

ecclesiastics alone were safe in the favoured vessel. Do not let me repeat the mediæval error. Let me talk frankly with the Lord. I, too, am among His priests, who have access to Him.[1]

Let the sacred function of the community be what it may, it must stand aside, after all, and leave the ground open, when the soul rises up and goes in to claim in Christ its access to the Father. 'As for me, nearness to God for me is good.' The whole record of redemption is full of man's open entrance into God. Such was the Divine delight in it that, ages before the historic and, as it were, public opening of the door, there was already a wonderful anticipation. The saints of the Old Law are found speaking their souls out to the Lord as the breath and habit of their lives—nothing between, absolutely nothing, but the fact of the promise and the covenant. True, their colloquies with God were of infinite significance to the community. Abraham under the Syrian stars, Moses on the desert cliff, Jeremiah in the courtyard in the beleaguered town, not only supplied examples of individual 'access'; their conversations with heaven made links in the story of the redemption of the world. But, none the less, it was in itself individual intercourse, personal, direct; 'nothing between.'

Think of the magnificent illustration of this in the Book of Psalms. No doubt the psalms for the Jewish Church, as for the Church Catholic, bore a liturgical significance. But, setting aside those that are public and corporate in their form, we have a mass, rich and wonderful, of purely individual psalms, in which rises just the call and cry of the Ego to the Eternal. 'I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall be glad in thy salvation'; 'My soul thirsteth for the living God'; 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice'; 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet'; 'As for me, nearness to God for me is good.' Whatever part, in the ages of the Psalmists, was played by the order and ritual of the society, the man, for his soul's inmost needs, was left alone with God; the servant went in to his Master to talk with Him, and the door was shut.

To pass into the New Testament in order to study individual converse with God is to take the clue of a labyrinth endless in its depth and beauty. Of this the words and the works of the Redeemer are alike full. 'I will; be thou clean'; 'I will manifest myself to him.' The incidents of the Acts are perpetually individualistic: the Eunuch in his carriage, Cornelius in his chamber, Lydia by the river. Above all, we have Saul of Tarsus, the man chosen by the Spirit to develop all that is most comprehensive and collective in the message of our salvation, but led to do all this in modes of exposition where the widest, the vastest, principles come to us alive with the experiences of the man with God—'In me there dwelleth no good thing'; 'Christ liveth in me'; 'He gave Himself for me'; 'He is able to keep my deposit against that day.' This is a magnificent individualism, sanctifying, beautifying, vital. This is no isolation to one's own will or even to one's own soul. This is an isolation which sends the soul out again, filled and expanded by His presence, to contribute to the community, to live no longer for itself, to be at His service in others all the day; even to see deeper into others, their struggles, their sorrows, and their sins, than it ever could do if it did not know itself in the light of intercourse with God. For that intercourse there is no substitute; it knows no second-best.

¶ 'You spoke as if you had come straight from the Presence,' a stranger said to Alexander Whyte. 'Perhaps I did,' he answered shyly. And indeed that was his settled home: and all his work was soaked in prayer.[1]

3. Nearness to God is vital, if we would be pure. Intercourse with God is the victorious secret of heart-purity—intercourse direct, individual, alone. The outward and inward foes to purity are strong and subtle. But there is a power, which the weakest Christian can seek, and find, and wield, which is adequate for their absolute defeat: 'they shall fall and perish *at thy presence*.' Nearness to God is vital, if we would be unwearied amidst a world indifferent, even when not positively corrupted, in the active strife for virtue. If there is a decline in England of enthusiasm for great moral causes, let us, at least, contribute our weight to the scale for virtue in her need against the mighty. And if we would do so in the right spirit, unhasting, unresting, patient, resolved, unembittered, absolutely convinced, we must be much in intercourse with God.

[1] A. Smellie.

[1] A. J. Gossip.

¶ Day by day the early waking hours of Charles Simeon, won by brave self-discipline from sleep, were spent, all through his life from young manhood onwards, in solitary converse with God. His rooms were his oratory, and so was the roof above them, where he paced the leads alone in long intercourse with his Lord. Thence flowed out the life spiritually so powerful. His last surviving intimate, the honoured William Carus, often spoke of the impression of his life. His thought was not of Simeon's energies, but of the source behind them. 'That was a wonderful life,' he said to me, 'the life he lived up there, all alone with God.' [1]

The Carved Work of Life

Ps. lxxiv. 6.—'And now all the carved work thereof together they break down with hatchet and hammers' (R.V.).

We are not sure to what historical situation the writer of this Psalm refers. It might apply to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldæans in the sixth century B.C., or to the oppression of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second. But what we are sure of are the circumstances which provoked the Psalmist's grief. The Holy Land has been overrun by heathen enemies, and Jerusalem is in ruins; the Temple has been desecrated and burnt to the ground. The Psalmist was absorbed in no selfish grief. It was his country and his church that he mourned. It was for this—for the outrage upon it, for the ruin of everything he held to be beautiful, and good, and true—it was for this he wept. For this he thrust himself upon God, and made Him listen. He recites a long catalogue of unfeeling brutalities as though to arouse God to indignation. He describes the wild invaders of his land—their laughter, their coarseness, their blindness and deadness to things so sacred to himself that to see them violated was to see the last sanctuary of life defiled; and the moral pain of it was something like what we should have felt if we had been present, knowing all we now know, when some one in that crowd on Calvary struck Jesus in the face. Into the Temple they had come, trampling down the fruit of man's highest toil. They were like men felling trees. They hacked at the pillars, destroying at a stroke what it had taken ages of feeling to suggest and to create. And—his memory dwells bitterly upon this in detail—'now all the carved work thereof they break down with hatchet and hammers.'

But let us leave the incident, and turn our thoughts to what is involved in the 'breaking down of the carved work.' The 'carved work' of life is more than a decoration. It is a vital expression of life itself; and any violence done to the carved work of life is violence done to the very pillar and foundation and principle of human life itself. The carved work, the outside manners, and courtesies, and amenities, which we are all apt to esteem too lightly, are in truth not irrelevant, not mere accidents or luxuries. They are, on the contrary, the expressions in which life at once *utters* itself, and *defends* itself.

1. It is true that from time to time manners and refinements in speech or behaviour fall under suspicion. But when manners are properly disparaged it is because they are mere manners. In that case our offence is not against what the New Testament calls 'the grace of life'; it is against a merely superficial imitation of that grace. Our indignation against the unreal thing is in a way our tribute to the value of the real thing. And there will always be room for such an indignation. For it is easy to assume a manner for the occasion which may in no real sense be the expression or outcome of a man's life. We are all agreed that any grace which is assumed in order to secure an advantage is evidence of a fundamental insincerity, and destroys for ever our confidence. Such imitations, however, sooner or later are discovered, and even before we can see the inner and very different material which they were intended to conceal, they never influence discerning people as does the genuine thing. In the presence of those whose ordinary bearing is a kind of patchwork and contrivance, we have the feeling of disappointment and resentment which we have when we take up a bunch of flowers and find that they are manufactured. They are wonderful; but it was not what we were expecting at the moment. We feel what an artistic mind feels face to face with any affectation or insincerity in decoration: for example, some surface covered with paper embossed to look like a fine moulding. The thing is not what it pretends to be. It has no right to be here. The carved work is of a different material, of a cheaper material, than the deeper

[1] H. C. G. Moule.

thing which it decorates. The only circumstance, perhaps, in which carved work may justifiably be of a different material from the wood or stone on which it rests is where the different material is costlier, rarer, more precious—as when in the Temple they crowned a pillar, or garlanded a beam, with gold.

But the demand which we make—and here art and morals are at one—is that the carved work shall be sincere; it must belong to the same material. What we contend for, however, is that we shall not suspect beauty or grace in life where it is real, and springs naturally and invincibly from the depth of personality. On the contrary, we must make up our mind that our own life is not the sound and healthy thing it should be if, as time goes on, we ourselves are not growing in grace. The very instinct which makes a man a good man beneath the surface of his life ought to make him, and will make him if his goodness is a strong and resolute thing, a good man on the surface of his life also. He may have his own way of expressing his inner quality; but it will be a real way, and will be quite easily understood by those whose feelings on such matters are right.

¶ In *The Daft Days* Neil Munro says of his heroine: 'Lennox Dyce all her days had the sweet engaging self-unconsciousness no training can command. Frankness; fearlessness; respect for all her fellows—the gifts that will never fail to make the proper friends.'

None of us can for ever avoid, even if we would, the display of our deeper characteristics. Far from disparaging grace and a fine manner in life, simply because they may be counterfeited, it is our duty at once to pay respect to these when we enjoy them at the hand of others, and to require of ourselves that our life shall declare itself in such signs. We must rebuke and suspect ourselves if we find ourselves justifying any want of finish or outward evidence in our life by saying that we are right at heart, and that it is as we are in the hidden parts that God judges us and we take our place. That is very true. But it is equally true that any real principle of life *will* make its proper appearance and give its proper sign; and we have as much reason to have our misgivings about a life which gives no obvious signs as we should be to suspect that some enemy, a worm for example, was gnawing at the root of a plant, if the plant persists in not appearing above the soil.

¶ One of the wisest men I ever knew replied once to a remark upon the extraordinary power of charm in human life as contrasted with brains or ability, 'Well! didn't you ever read it in the New Testament?' Where? He suggested the passage: 'By love serve one another.' The essence of charm is, after all, the recognition of the other man's personality and his feelings without saying so, the tacit contribution of rest and gaiety of mind to him—the very things that help him best to face the world. Why should you take the trouble? Can you do it by taking the trouble? You can only do it by a fundamental belief that the other man matters—a belief that becomes instinct. The people who help you with their charm don't know how much they do for you. Charm becomes the natural expression of the nature with those who consort with Jesus, and it gives them a new sense of leisure, a new sense of humour, and a new sympathy. Charm and the Cross seem to be different vocabularies; but are they?[1]

2. But not only is the 'carved work' the proper fulfilment of the hidden principles of our life: the carved work is also, so to speak, the best defence of those principles. Any one who is harsh enough to take rude liberties with those manners and fine precautions which in course of time have come to be associated with the proper principles of life will not stop there, but will proceed to wreck the very pillars which bear the delicate tracery. From the day when man began to make lines and figures on stone or wood, it was with the intention of defending those pillars and slabs of stone or wood from unfeeling and outrageous men. It was a way of saying, 'Take care, there is something more in this than you may think. The man who will do violence to this in spite of the tracery which it bears is a man who is not to be trusted with any matter requiring personal honour.' And that, really, is what is being sought in those manners and conventions even which every society demands of those who would become members of it. Every level of society insists upon its own etiquette in essential matters, even as the Church surrounds its central mysteries with an appropriate ritual. And any breach of that accepted etiquette is not regarded lightly. On the contrary its penalties declare

[1] T. R. Glover, *Saturday Papers*, 28.

that one who has done violence to those delicate and unwritten laws has, there and then in spirit, done violence to certain elementary decencies, on which all sane human living rests.

Again and again, and especially after a time of social disasters and general uneasiness, there has been a sudden and unanimous return towards severity in matters which were thought to be of no consequence. And the explanation is just this, that, at a time when freedom of every kind has landed us in embarrassment and confusion, we are all in a mood to insist that henceforward right principles of life shall be defended, not at the last ditch and at the citadel, but out on the remote frontier and circumference.

3. But, apart from all mere reasons for grace and finish in life, our Lord appealed to us on behalf of such a grace and finish on the ground that such things are beautiful in themselves. When that Roman centurion, in a fine phrase, deprecated our Lord's proposal to come all the way to his house, assuring our Lord that His word was enough, Jesus approved not only of the man's faith, but also of the manner in which he expressed the mood and feeling of his soul. 'When you are going to do a good thing,' said Jesus, again and again, in effect, 'do it graciously. When a man asks you to go with him a mile, say "certainly," and go two miles. Do more than the occasion barely demands. Carve some lily-work on the stout pillar of your dutiful deeds.'

And it was our Lord who counselled us to take care how we respected the delicate carved work with which the citadel of life, of virtue, of honour is defended in others' lives and in our own. It was Jesus who warned us of the horrid background that had already been opened in a man's soul by the utterance of even one dubious word, or one indelicate glance. It was Jesus who bade us judge ourselves by our attitude to the outworks and defences and approaches to another's personality. It was Jesus who said, 'He that looketh'—in a certain way, 'hath already committed in his heart' a dark unholy deed! By his unrestraint a man may already, if his soul was in his momentary look, have done violence to the carved work which is there to safeguard the pillar of another's honour.

Summer

Ps. lxxiv. 17.—'Thou hast made summer.'

Why do spring and autumn inspire the poets to song, whilst summer goes unsung? Can no one sing of perfection? The reason must be within us, in some curious defect of mind, some morbidity of nature, some fear of perfection. It is partly because we can hardly realize beauty unless it is set against something stern and forbidding. The tender blade that thrusts itself through the cold, hard ground, the faint mist of green upon the tree, the feeble flower that faces the wintry wind—these move us strangely. No one sings the rose of summer, unless it be the last one blooming alone. Where beauty is triumphant we lack the stimulus of comparison and find ourselves unmoved.

We praise God at prime and evensong, not at high and glorious noon. We are so accustomed to the twilight, so inured to imperfection, so sure pain must be hidden somewhere, that the unclouded sun, the perfect beauty, the untroubled day makes us uneasy, suspicious, out of temper, grumbling because there is nothing to grumble about. We can only be happy if we have just been miserable. Our song lacks inspiration unless there be some sadness in it.

It is also partly because perfection leaves us bereft of the power of expression. We have lavished all our highest praise on lower revelations, used up all our superlatives on the lesser beauties, and when that which is perfect is come we are silent. So the finest days leave no mark in the memory, for happiness leaves nothing to record. Before the song of the redeemed breaks forth we learn that there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. The mystic experience is eloquent, until it reaches its consummation; and then its lips are sealed, and it is no longer lawful to speak. So the greatest joys are never recorded; perfection is never described. Forgetting this, we forget that the memory is treacherous, that history is one great lie since it is but half the truth, that the spirits of just men made perfect *cannot* speak to us, and that the silence beyond this Babel earth is not the silence of death, but the silence of perfect life.

1. *The perfection of summer is its luxuriance.*—Man reaches the idea of perfection chiefly through negation. Philosophy attains to the idea of the perfect Being only by denying to Him all those things which are human. The highest reach of pagan philosophy, blending metaphysics and mysticism as never before or since, is found in Neo-Platonism, and it has been said, not unfairly, that it deifies the attribute Not. It can tell you everything that God is not; it cannot tell you one thing that God is. It is doubtful whether we can even predicate existence of Him.

Classical art reaches its perfection through its rigorous rejection. In architecture we have the simplest lines, the purest forms, the fewest decorative devices. The Greek temple is fitted to stand only on the mountain-top and against a cloudless sky—for it is as white and as cold as snow. It has attained this perfection by studiously refusing everything that would disharmonize, cutting down everything to sheer simplicity, so that the whole thing is grasped in a moment. Its perfect statuary is the same. It found in the hard, clear marble the medium it preferred. Greek sculptures are so still they seem asleep, their eyes look nowhere, they are as oblivious of outward trouble as they are superior to inward pain. And this is the classical idea of the Divine; not God become man through pain, but man become God through *apathia*. The moment their architecture or their art attempted more it became decadent and all its beauty and inspiration fled.

This is typical of many of our modern proposals. The thought of the impersonal has been adopted in order to clarify our idea of God. This leaves Him free from moods, arbitrariness, preferences, which seem inseparable from personality. If God is impersonal, then everything is explained and the idea of deity is purified and simplified. Then He can permeate all things equally, He becomes the great deep ocean of rest beneath the surface fretted and fuming with the storm, He is the end of all differences, oppositions, inconsistencies. Science promises help for humanity by intense simplification. When things are analysed to their ultimate constitution, then we have explained existence. Mankind is to be redeemed by systems, by laws based on averages, by the truth gained by statistics. Religion will cease to be the cause of quarrelling and division that it has been in the past if only we reduce all religions to their lowest common denominator. Simplicity is the one salvation.

But the perfection of summer-time is quite different. It is prodigal, luxurious, lavish. All feeling of economy has vanished, restraint is abandoned. There is a majesty of form. Trees clothe themselves until they are as massive as hills, and they stand together like towering cliffs of green. Clouds pile themselves higher and higher in the vast dome of blue until they look like mighty mountains. The green background of the all-covering verdure is only a setting for a riot of colour. The flowers have been gathering in depth of tone, in variety, and in great heaped masses, until they assault the eye with their brilliance. Life reaches its supreme display of vitality and variety. Close examination of earth or sea will reveal that it is swarming with life. Summer speaks of the potency of Nature to satisfy, and more than satisfy, man. There is no suggestion of penury, no fear of exhaustion, no need for economy. The eye is satisfied with seeing, the body with warmth, the heart with delight.

Praise
In Summer's golden days and jocund ways!
—In all her matronly provisioning
For every want—and more! When her full store
Of fruit and flower she hastens to outpour
Upon us with a great glad joyous laugh,
And bids us her full bowls of nectar quaff.[1]

If this is Nature, the mere garment of God and the veil of His glory, what is God Himself; what the height and depth and breadth and length of His love; what His many coloured wisdom; what the fullness of joy at His right hand? We need fear no monotony, no incapacity for further surprises, no coming to an end. God is the fullness which filleth all in all.

We quaff our fill of beauty, peace, delight:
But mid the entrancing scene a still voice saith,
'If earth, heaven's shadow, shows a face so bright,
What of God's summer past the straits of death?'[2]

[1] John Oxenham, *All Clear!* 81. [2] Hayne.

2. *Christianity emphasizes this perfection of fullness.*—It is the summer religion. Like all propagative religions, it was born in the summer lands, under the Syrian sun; and it issues forth to do battle with the dim gods of the twilight. Its great competitor in those early days was Mithraism, the religion of the sun, and it beat it in fair fight, winning by a glory greater than the sun. The light that smote Paul on the Damascus road was brighter than the sun at noonday.

The general tendency of Christianity is towards extravagance. That is seen in its artistic forms. The great type of Christian architecture is the Gothic, which breaks away from the classical perfection to seek a perfection more embracing. It takes every variety of line and form, and throws them together until they mount by sheer pressure in the soaring spire. It is seen in its worship. No one can say that Christian worship is dull. At its best it is as full of splendour as the heaven above and the earth beneath. It has turned the simple Supper of the Lord, and the commemoration of Christ's dying, into a pageant; and when all this is forbidden, then it seeks another expression, that of music and singing, and breaks forth into hymns and psalms and spiritual songs. The one thing about which all Christians are agreed is that they should praise, and it is the one exercise where they grow Catholic and overstep all boundaries. In its hymns the Church is already one.

We moderns find a difficulty in believing Christianity because it is too full for us to grasp. Its chief hindrance is that it offers us more than we ask. Many of us could manage quite well without God becoming man. Some of us could dispense with the benefits of Christ's Passion. Others could believe quite easily without the Resurrection. That there should be twelve gates into the Holy City is a bewilderment to many who feel there should be only one, and that one strictly guarded.

The constant complaint about Christianity is that it encourages extremes, produces fanatics, goes too far. It has made of Christ too universal a figure, filling heaven and earth. Its dreams are too ambitious, it babbles of world evangelization, and in this generation. It wants to apply Christianity to economics and international relationships, when everyone knows it ought to be confined to private life. It ignores the slow development of character, and expects instantaneous conversions. We are referred to Nature, which is said to be slow, and then Christianity produces parables from Nature of the rapid working of leaven, the wonderful growth of the mustard tree, the four months which is all that separates seedtime from harvest. It expects perfection, and urges that 'He made summer.'

3. *The message of summer is man's right to joy.*—Whatever Christianity means it means that. The New Testament is quite definite on this point. Its message is an evangel: it is good news. The life of Christ is set in rejoicing. It begins with an announcement of good tidings of great joy. It ends with the All-hail at Eastertide. The teaching of Jesus is full of joy. He likens the Father to the beneficent sun, and bids us let our light shine. He is continually likening the Kingdom of Heaven to a feast, to a marriage.

¶ 'This was His own picture of Himself,' Bruce Barton writes[1]—'a bridegroom! The centre and soul of a glorious existence; a bringer of news so wonderful that those who received it should be marked by their radiance as by a badge. For three years Jesus walked up and down the shores of His lake and through the streets of towns and cities, trying to make them understand. Then came the end, and . . . the distortion began. He who cared nothing for ceremonies and forms was made the idol of formalism. Men hid themselves in monasteries; they lashed themselves with whips; they tortured their skins with harsh garments, and cried out that they were followers of Him—of *Him* who loved the crowd, who gathered children about Him wherever He went, who celebrated the calling of a new disciple with a feast in which all the neighbourhood joined! "Hold your heads high," He had exclaimed. "You are lords of the universe . . . only a little lower than the angels . . . children of God." But the hymn writers knew better. They wrote:

'Oh, to be nothing, nothing'

and

'For such a *worm* as I.'

This is all the more emphatic since the gospel is so alive to the sorrows of life, treats sin so

[1] *The Man Nobody Knows*, 72.

seriously, warns men of what they may miss. Because it finds the great way to life in a willingness to lay it down, because it embraces the Cross, because it finds joy where the world never dreams of looking for it, we have rather lost its emphasis. We always fall into plaintiveness when we chant the Beatitudes, but their one emphatic word is 'Happy,' and Christ meant it. If He speaks of death, endurance, sacrifice, the end to which it always looks is life, joy, cheer. It brings the prodigal back from his famine and dejection, but it is to music and dancing he comes home.

Christianity is not afraid that a perfect joy would ever pall. Here it is opposed to the prevailing opinion. It is not at all afraid of a perpetual peace. It is not afraid of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. There are those who tell us that, if poverty could be abolished, the fear of starvation removed, and the bribe of wealth no longer in operation, everyone would become lazy, and society would simply tumble to pieces. What is called in the New Testament the Kingdom of God they call 'the end of all things.' So it is, and the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth.

Let us not, then, fear to raise the standard of joy for all. The beauty of Nature, the glorious perfection of summer-time, are a continual reproach to man for his penury, his fear, his misery. Some of us are feeling our way back to the joy Christ purchased for us at such cost; there is coming to us an assurance in Him that sets us not arguing, or preaching even, so much as singing.

Summer and Winter

Ps. lxxiv. 17.—'Thou hast made summer and winter.'

It is always easy to believe that God has made the summer-time. There is something in a perfect summer day that speaks to us of the Divine. The beauty which is round us everywhere, the singing of the birds in every coppice, the warmth of the pleasant summer sun, the amazing prodigality of life—these, as by filaments invisible, draw our hearts to the Giver of them all, and make it easy to say, 'Thou hast made the summer.'

But our text says more than that. It says not only 'Thou hast made summer.' It says 'Thou hast made summer and winter.' It was an old belief that rival deities had been at work on Nature. It was not the handiwork of one god; it was the handiwork of two gods. And all the sharp antagonisms of the universe, and all the contrasts amid which we live, were but the tokens of their mutual enmity. Had the one made the glory of the day? The other had made the darkness of the night. Had the one cheered us with the genial heat? The other had cursed us with the bitter cold. It was one power that made the radiant morn; it was another that made the deepening shadow. There were millions of people who believed that once, and there are millions who believe it still. How different, how superbly different, is the spiritual vision of this singer! It was the God of Abraham who made the summer. It was his God who made the winter too. The very hand that decked the summer meadow, and cast the mantle of green upon the forest, touched that summer glory and it died. Thou hast made the summer *and* the winter. Thou hast clothed and thou hast stripped again. Thou hast lengthened out the shining hours, and thou hast crushed them into a little space. Thou hast created the gentle breath of evening that falls with benediction on the cheek, and thou the bitter and the piercing blast.

Let us carry this great truth into a higher sphere. It is the self-same God who has made the summer and winter of the heart. There come to every man experiences which are tingling with the touch of heaven. They are so radiant and so delightful that we never doubt the hand which gave us them. It is good to be grateful for such recurring gladness, but more is needed for a life of victory. He who would conquer must have faith to say, 'Thou hast made summer *and* winter.' God is not only gracious when the sun shines. He is as gracious when the wind is keen. He gives the glory and He strips the glory, and on His vesture is the name of love. He who can trace His hand when it is winter—who can still say He loves me and He knows—has won the secret of that abiding peace which the world cannot give and cannot take away.

¶ In his *Analecta* Robert Wodrow has a touching incident of his own father. 'He was much affected with his worthy son, Mr Alexander Wodrow's death, it being somewhat suddain and surprising. Yet he carried very Christianly under that sharp dispensation. . . . He went down to the place where his son's corpse was.

He stayed some time. They enquired at him what he had been doing there. "I was," sayes he, "thanking God for thretty-one years' loan of Sandy, my dear son." '[1]

How is it that God makes the summer? It is a truth which science will corroborate that out of the winter God has made the summer. When a child rises in the morning, what an exuberance of life is there! She will go singing through the morning hour as though her little nursery were a paradise. And her eyes are bright as if the sun had touched them, and she will move her feet as if to music; and all that life, so wonderful and glad, has been created in the womb of sleep. We say that in winter everything is dead. That is what they said of Jairus' daughter. And then came Christ, and looked at her, and said, 'The maiden is not dead, but sleepeth.' So have we learned that in the dead of winter—and we never talk about the dead of summer—what we call death is but the children's sleep. Life has not vanished though the eyes be closed. The garment of beauty has been laid aside, but the heart still beats within the frame. And then comes morning—comes the *summer* morning—and it is ours, in all its gladsomeness, because of the quiet sleep of winter-time. Perpetual summer would be loss unutterable. There is no greenness of the grass in June unless there be the chillness of November. God needs the one if He would make the other; fashions the glory out of the decay; lays the field under the grip of ice that it may be golden with the waving grain.

It is as true of us as of the earth that winter holds the secret of the summer. Out of December God will fashion June. Out of the cross He fashions the crown. Out of the trial that was so hard to bear He brings the beauty of the saintly character.

¶ Madame Guyon records that once she was on a journey upon a dark and difficult errand. She and her little daughter found themselves among some rushes by a river's brink. The child plucked many of these and made them into little green crosses, which she hung all over her mother. Then she found some flowers which she made into a wreath, and, laying it on Madame Guyon's head, she said: 'Mother—after the cross you will be crowned.'[2]

[1] A. Smellie, *In the Secret Place*, 48.
[2] J. M. E. Ross, *The Tree of Healing*, 111.

Perpetual sunshine makes people selfish. It makes them brilliant, perhaps, but never deep. They do not understand. They never know. They condescend; they cannot sympathize. All that is beautiful in men and nations springs from the season when the tree is stripped. All that is fairest in the world rises from the darkness of the Cross.

¶ The river Tweed is beautiful and haunted by a hundred memories. And yet that river, in whose gentle murmuring we catch the echo of unforgotten voices, rises where everything is bleak and bare. There is no beauty that we should desire it there. There is only the desolate and lonely moor. There is no song, no shadowing of tree, no gathering of the great dead beside its waters. Out of that winter God has made its summer, and to that summer come a thousand pilgrims who know not, for they have never seen, the bleak and barren region of its rise.

Why has God made the summer and the winter? There is only one answer that can be given to that. Not for their own sakes has He made them—not for their sublimity or beauty merely. Through night and day, through sunshine and through storm, God has His purpose, which is never baffled. And that one purpose—how shall we describe it? Put in simple language it is this. It is the purpose for every living thing that after summer there should be the harvest. God, of course, has many purposes in every providence and every season. Undoubtedly when He made the summer beautiful He meant it to give pleasure to His children. But there is one end deeper than all others, and reaching from the highest to the lowest, and that is the end which has its sign and sacrament in the mellowing of the harvest field. Nothing is beautiful in Nature for its own sake. Beauty is a trust for others' sakes. Summer and winter look beyond themselves to the time when the flower shall wither and the fruit shall come. He that liveth to himself is dead. Our gifts—our summer sun and winter storm—these have an end to serve in other lives. We are not here simply to be happy. We are here to serve and be a blessing. And 'Thou hast made our summer and our winter' that we may have the joy of harvest-home.

The Cup of the Lord

Ps. lxxv. 8.—'In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same.'

1. In the events which are commemorated in Holy Week are concentrated the real issues of the Christian revelation. The contending forces are brought face to face; they join in deadly combat; the victory is decided—the apparent victory and the real victory. And we are asked—we cannot evade the question—on which side we stand.

To the careless and indifferent the wistful appeal, 'Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?' falls on unhearing ears. But to those who welcome this holy season and wish to have their faith and love quickened by it, there is another appeal. Our Lord speaks to us in the words which He addressed to the sons of Zebedee, words which assuredly were meant not for them only, but for all His disciples. We have to answer the question which He put to James and John: 'Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' It sounds a stern and terrible question. Those favoured disciples had been dazzled with the mysterious light of Tabor; their Master was bringing them to Gethsemane. They had dreamed of thrones and subject provinces; they were to see their King reigning from the Tree. Nay; we remember how the thought of that Cup appalled even our Lord Himself. Shall we, then, with our fuller knowledge of what 'this cup' meant, dare to answer with the two disciples, 'We are able'? Shall we dare to lift to our lips the cup which our Saviour Himself feared to drain?

Yet we may remember that the associations of God's 'cup' are not all tragic. What is 'the cup of the Lord' in our text? What is the 'cup of salvation' in another Psalm? What is 'the cup of blessing' in St Paul? Are they two different cups? Are we to distinguish between the cup which Christ drained and the cup which He blessed? Are we to divide the Passion from the Eucharist? No, the two are one. The Eucharist is the communion of the Passion. If it were not so, it would perhaps be a communion of hope and joy to those who have not sinned. It would not be so to those who have felt the power of sin. Those who communicate worthily have found the secret of joy, for they have the life of Christ. But they are dedicated to fellowship in His sufferings, that their fellowship in His glory may be real.

This is the dominant conception of the Passion-narrative in St John. The motto or title of all the last part of his Gospel is 'Glory'—the glorification of Christ through self-chosen suffering. We are not to think of a defeat followed by a victory. The victory was won in and through suffering; it did not simply come after it. The powers of evil were conquered in the moment of their apparent triumph, and by the fact of their apparent triumph. All this is in 'the cup' which our Saviour drained, and which He gives us to drink. The 'red wine' with which the cup of the Lord is 'full mixed,' and which He poureth out for us, is His blood. Blood—the symbol of life, not of death; but of life poured out, consecrated by dying.

2. What does this challenge mean to us, dropping metaphor and mysticism? 'Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of?' We know that we must answer, 'We can.' But what is involved in our acceptance of the challenge? 'We are able'—at any rate we wish to try—to do what? Surely the cup is the burden of human sorrow and human sin, the accumulated results of all the errors and vices and crimes that poor humanity commits every day. A bitter draught it is, we might say when it is put before us. Jesus Christ was willing to drain it. He took up the burden of human frailty. He voluntarily opposed Himself to all the organized tyranny, bigotry, hypocrisy, selfishness, treachery, and cowardice, of His time. He would not bend before it. He withstood it to the face. He let it crush Him, and by so doing He conquered it.

There is nothing incomprehensible, nothing fantastic, about this. The powers of evil are enormously strong. They constitute a crushing burden, which punishes everybody, guilty and innocent alike. Society blunders along under this burden like an unwieldy, half-blind giant, stupidly and half-unconsciously trampling down those who get in its way. And in every generation there are those who add to the world's burden, and there are those who lighten it.

There are those who show a wonderful cleverness in giving their burdens to others to carry, and tripping along themselves unencumbered. Indeed, the art of living, as practised by the man of the world, consists chiefly in leaving the heavy baggage to others, and strapping a neat and comfortable little knapsack on his own shoulders. We all do this more or less. And the worst of it is that it is very difficult to tell whether we are, from the highest point of view, carrying our own pack, and paying our way in life, or not. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, are we profitable servants, useful workers and fighters, or parasites, paupers and camp-followers? That is the great question. That is what we shall be judged by. We profess to be followers of the greatest Friend that mankind ever had, of Him who gave all for men and took nothing from them. This was the cup that He chose to drink—a life of loving ungrudging service, which, just because it was so absolutely noble and disinterested, terrified into frantic opposition those forces of evil which are glad to give a condescending patronage to half-hearted and half-sincere preachers of righteousness. The world does not crucify the ambitious reformer; it gives him a comfortable berth. What is the driving force in our lives? The thought of what we may get out of society, or what we may put into it? That is the root of the matter.

¶ Anthony Ashley Cooper was an Earl, and married an Earl's daughter. He became a member of Parliament before he was twenty-six. He formed a close friendship with the great Duke of Wellington. He was made a Lord of the Admiralty at thirty-three, but at forty-two he joined—what? This man, welcomed in every drawing-room in London, a member of the House of Lords, a Cabinet Minister, a D.C.L. of Oxford, with six boys each of whom was Lord Somebody; this man, a friend of Queen Victoria, and the heir to an Earldom and great wealth, at forty-two years of age gave up society and all amusements and joined the Ragged School Union! He spent the rest of a long life labouring for the poor and the outcast. That is the story of the great Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury.[1]

That is the claim, the challenge, that Christ makes to us. Are we able, and willing, to serve and follow Him in this spirit? We cannot tell what He will require of us; it may be much or it may be little; but have we the spirit of love and the spirit of obedience, in which Christ Himself lived and died for men? If we have, we may answer humbly but confidently, 'We are able'; for our great Captain will set us no impossible tasks.

Can'st thou drink the cup I drank of?
Can'st thou bear to be baptized
With the baptism of bitterness and Truth?
Can'st thou see thy dreams all dying,
And thy hopes around thee lying
In a ruin, and retain the eyes of youth?

Can'st thou hear the Siren's calling
And stand firm, with strong men falling?
Can'st defy the sons of Belial running wild?
Can'st thou see Love's honour slighted,
And its fairest blossom blighted,
And live on, still looking forward like a child?

Then arise, my knight defender,
Be thou terrible and tender,
In the strength that down the ages has sufficed,
And, in scorn of all their scorning,
Seek the splendour of the morning,
When the darkness shall be shattered by the Christ.[1]

[1] B. L. Woolf.

God's Use of Man's Wrath

Ps. lxxvi. 10.—'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.'

THERE is a wrath of man which is right, which a man ought to feel, which every true man does feel. Suppose you are brought face to face with some act of cruel and calculated wickedness against those who are innocent and helpless. You will not merely feel sorrow for the victims, but also you cannot but feel strong anger against the criminal. It is instinctive and has the immediate sanction of your conscience. It is, moreover, sanctioned by the example of Jesus.

¶ We are told of Dean Church that he was scarcely ever moved to resentment by any personal slight, but on one occasion a friend related to him a story of extreme and inexcusable baseness; and, says the friend, 'the white heat of

[1] G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, *Lighten our Darkness*, 45.

silent, flashing anger which it brought into his eyes taught me to realize, as never before, what is meant by " the wrath of the Lamb." '

As Carlyle used to insist, a capacity for noble anger is an essential element of human nature; is, indeed, no bad measure of its nobleness. But then, man's wrath is often not noble. It is an impure flame, whose fuel is pride, envy, malice, selfish greed or ambition. It comes from beneath, not from above. It is directed not against evil, but against whatsoever or whomsoever stands in its way. It takes no account of innocence or weakness. It takes pleasure in the infliction of suffering for its own sake. It destroys like a devouring fire.

Now, can God make use of man's evil wrath? Our text says He can. He can make it praise Him.

1. God may use it as a foil, or background, to show forth His power. This seems to have been what the Psalmist had in mind. Probably he wrote just after Jerusalem's sudden and wonderful deliverance from the Assyrians. 'The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold.' They said in their hearts: 'We will make an end of Sion; we will wipe it out.' The king and his people were pale and trembling; silent and stupefied with terror. There seemed no way of escape from Sennacherib and his hosts. Some counselled submission. Then Isaiah stood forth and said in God's name, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' They were to do nothing. In other circumstances, He might have required them to fight. But now He told them merely to wait and see. So they went to their homes. They lay down and slept. And in the morning they looked out from the walls, and lo! the enemy was gone. God had interposed—Jerusalem was saved.

Thus God magnified His power over the wrath of Assyria as He had done long before over the wrath of Egypt. He proved to His people that He was their refuge and strength—a very present help in trouble, and for a time His people put their trust in Him and realized that His unseen presence was their best security—was better to them than walls and bulwarks.

¶ On one of Motley's most glowing pages, we are told how, after the frightful siege and fall of Haarlem, and with Alkmaar closely invested by the Duke of Alva, when the cause of the Netherlands seemed in direst straits, Diedrich Sonoy, the lieutenant governor of North Holland, wrote the Prince of Orange, inquiring whether he had arranged some foreign alliance, and received the reply: 'You ask if I have entered into a firm treaty with any great king or potentate; to which I answer, that before I ever took up the cause of the oppressed Christians in these provinces, I had entered into a close alliance with the King of kings; and I am firmly convinced that all who put their trust in Him shall be saved by His almighty hand. The God of armies will raise up armies for us to do battle with our enemies and His own.' And the opening of the dykes brought the very sea itself to the assistance of the brave contestants for truth and liberty.[1]

2. There is another way in which God can make the wrath of man to praise Him. He can overrule it for His purpose, can use it by His wisdom in the service of His love.

(1) History continually shows bad men serving high ends. This is the specific teaching of Pharaoh's record. 'For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth.' The interpretation of which is not that God made Pharaoh what he was, but, seeing what he was, and how he had become a fanatical oppressor of Israel, God made use of him for the furtherance of a world-embracing scheme of redemption. Pharaoh became an unwilling and unconscious minister of God and humanity. Addressing his brethren, Joseph said: 'As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.' Henry VIII. furnishes a modern illustration of the fact that personal wickedness may indirectly contribute to the public good; that a bad man may become an eminent minister of civilization and progress. History teems with instances of the overruling of human wrath to human advantage; but is not the supreme instance of this subordination recorded in the crucifixion of our Lord?

(2) Bad institutions work gracious effects. Important qualities and virtues are developed by military life, and in various ways war has proved a source of blessing. This is not, however, because war is in any real sense good; it is a terrible evil overruled by heaven to ends of

[1] H. S. Coffin, *Some Christian Convictions*, 179.

liberty and progress which ought to be attained on happier lines.

¶ Bates tells how he watched pieces of porous pumice-stone floating on the Amazon which had drifted down from the distant volcanoes of the Andes, and were being carried to the Atlantic. He believed that these fragments of lava, borne by ocean currents, transported in the particles of earth lodged in their cavities seeds and plants destined to bloom on distant shores. Thus the destructive becomes the constructive; the ashes of the volcano are converted into messengers of life and beauty.

(3) Bad movements often result in good. The French Revolution, for example, was a bloody orgy; yet thinking men are agreed that, in important particulars, it has contributed to the larger liberty and enrichment of mankind. Some time ago a terrible cloud of locusts settled on certain districts of South Africa, threatening their utter devastation, when in the very nick of time disease broke out amongst the destroyers, a strange parasite attacked them, and they perished by millions, fertilizing the soil they threatened to devastate. This was the splinter of a great law that is operative everywhere, and always. St Paul writes of the moral law as 'working death by that which is good'; on the contrary, Divine Providence is ever working life and blessing by that which is evil.

3. Let us not be overpowered by the vision of the power of evil. The Apostle Paul rebukes the Corinthians, 'Ye look at the things that are before your face.' Or, as Way translates it, 'Have you eyes for the outward semblance only?' And this is repeatedly our fault in estimating the place and power of evil. We have eyes for the external aspect of it, we consider only the surface of things. Our view must be more profound. The power of ungodliness and iniquity is represented in revelation by the wild, raging sea which threatens to engulf the nations, whilst yet it is held in check by dust, the plaything of a child. On the other hand, the power of God is represented by 'the waters of Shiloah which go softly.' But few things are more wonderful than the energy of waters which go softly.

¶ In the great cañon of Arizona a quiet stream of water has eaten through miles of solid rock, and cut sheer down through thousands of yards of massive limestone to make itself a channel. No explosive gunpowder, no blasting dynamite, only the conquest of softness and silence.

Let us have great faith in the mysterious forces which, though silent, are strong, slow but sure. '*There* he brake the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle.' He whose dwelling-place is Zion vanquishes the powers of darkness; He whose tabernacle is in Salem routs by the breath of His mouth the alien army clothed in lightning and thunder. To doubt is disloyalty, to falter is sin; for the kingdom that cometh without observation is the Kingdom of God and of His Christ, and He shall reign, He shall reign the wide world over, He shall reign for ever.

The Mystery of Good

Ps. lxxvii. 3.—'I remembered God, and was troubled.'

It is undoubtedly because we 'remember God,' and therefore expect such different things, that we are often bewildered, if not crushed, by the painful disappointments and perplexities which we encounter in life. It was the reality of the Psalmist's faith which gave point and weight to his mental anguish. It belongs, however, to the very essence of manhood that our judgments should rule our feelings. We can never afford to allow our emotions to become our dictators. Confessedly, when we think of all earth's innocent suffering, especially that due to accident, disease, calamity, and famine, our problems are more grievous than those of the ancient seer. And it must be frankly owned that no complete answer as to why suffering should be so manifold in its nature and so indiscriminate in its occasion is to be obtained from science or philosophy or religion.

Meanwhile, if we are utterly unable to solve the mysteries of life's darker side, there is one thing we can do, namely, observe and appreciate the brighter side. In so doing we may come to understand how a Laureate could write—

> And all is well, tho' faith and form
> Be sunder'd in the night of fear;
> Well roars the storm to those that hear
> A deeper voice across the storm.

That 'deeper voice' has always been audible to those who have listened for it, in spite of all

earth's tempest of sighs and groans. For besides that tenderest and truest voice of all which the Christian heart recognizes in the midst of the direst tumult, saying, 'It is I, be not afraid,' there are yet other intimations and assurances which cannot be mistaken and ought never to be forgotten. The ancient apostolic appeal to these is increasingly valid for every generation. 'And yet God left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.' This boundless and ceaseless mystery of good in Nature merits much more appreciation than it receives.

There is a well-known proverb that 'the exception proves the rule,' and this may have quite as valid application to matters vast and difficult as to the trifles of an hour. For it can never be said too plainly, or too often, that even now it is the good which is the rule and the evil which is the exception. In face of all the facts, this is not a world that can be truly represented by a few white streaks upon a black ground, but rather by a few dark lines upon a white ground. Let us first call to remembrance a few of the facts.

1. In the whole realm of living things we find beneficent wonders and mysteries of good on every hand.

(1) In *the vegetable world* the scrutiny which is most thorough most clearly shows these to be innumerable. Tennyson's oft-quoted apostrophe to the 'flower in the crannied wall' is forceful, but it makes no pretence of answering the larger questions why there should be any flowers at all, or why flowers should be robed in all the hues of the rainbow and enriched so often with the fragrance which is beyond describing. If some morning men awoke to find the fields all clad in khaki, and every flower enswathed in hopeless drab, maybe the wonder of the work of chlorophyll which gives us the refreshing green as well as our vegetarian food, together with the selective powers of the plant tissues whereby they extract from the sun's rays the colours which make them so beautiful in our eyes, would seem more worthy of regard. The modern biologist, with his ever-perfecting microscope, peers more and more closely into the mystery of growth. But all he can see is that it is as it is. Why, and how, are as utterly beyond him as beyond a babe. The magic word 'evolution' does but magnify and intensify that mystery of good for which there is no ultimate or logical explanation save in the benevolence of God.

¶ 'Fiona Macleod' tells how one morning he came upon Seumas, an old fisherman of the Islands of the West, standing still with his wide, blue bonnet in his hand, the sun shining upon his mass of white hair, and his glad, still youthful eyes gazing lovingly upon the sea. 'Morning after morning,' the old man explained, 'fair weather or foul, after I have risen from my prayers, and ere I have broken my fast, I come here and remove my hat, and bow my head with joy and thanksgiving before the beauty of the world.'[1]

(2) Still more clear and true and strong, however, is the testimony of the higher realms of *animal life*. The most false and mischievous lines that a great poet ever wrote are those—far too often quoted—concerning the man of faith:

> Who trusted God was love indeed
> And love Creation's final law—
> Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shriek'd against his creed.

For Nature really does nothing of the sort. Such a suggestion is but the grossest exaggeration of one-sided sentimentality. It may be truthfully affirmed that whatever may be the 'struggle for existence,' the amount of happiness at any given time throughout the whole animal world overwhelmingly exceeds the amount of pain. We may not be able fully to apprehend the universal reasons why pain and death should be the way of life, but we are able to see that the happy facts of the mystery of good in animal existence transcend the dark side of suffering as truly as some great mountain transcends the little hillocks at its base.

(3) But let us enter boldly into the highest realm of all, even that *human life* wherein confessedly the deepest shadows fall. Whatever may be the gruesome representations of some scientists or theologians, it is here that Nature's mystery of good finds its noblest height and its profoundest depth.

Let us think first of these wondrous bodies of ours. 'Know ye not,' said the Apostle, 'that

[1] E. Herman, *The Secret Garden of the Soul*, 99.

your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?' and modern science unquestionably points to it as the most wonderful and beautiful structure in the whole organic world. When good Dr Watts expressed his thankful astonishment that

A harp of a thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long,

his theology was better than his physiology, for he would have been decidedly nearer the truth if he had said a thousand million strings. So much greater, therefore, should our admiration be than his.

It cannot be denied that the normal human body is manifestly made for enjoyment. It is evidently intended to yield us the peace of painlessness, the delight of the practical use of its myriad parts, the luxury of energetic effort. The amount of happiness in an average individual human life immensely exceeds the degree of pain.

¶ Of many noble things recorded concerning Gladstone, it is certainly not the least that on one occasion, during his last six months' illness, when a friend expressed his fear that the venerable sufferer's pain was great, Gladstone acknowledged that it was, but he added, 'You must remember that I have had eighty-six times twice six months free from pain.'

It is precisely this proportion between good and ill which is so generally forgotten, although it is equally true on the average concerning shorter and less favoured lives. The spectacle of suffering, let alone its endurance, is necessarily grievous to sensitive minds and tender hearts, but if our feelings point to the lesser mystery, our judgment must be heard in its insisting on the greater. It must be remembered that the number of healthy, and so far happy, human beings in the world is immensely in excess of those in suffering. Plague, famine, earthquake, accident are, as facts, dreadful enough, and we may neither forget nor ignore them. Nevertheless, they do not in the least lessen these principles, and it remains beyond question that the overwhelming majority of earth's millions of sensitive rational beings at this moment are so far enjoying life, in the painless use of all those marvellous faculties which make consciousness a boon.

But further, when we speak of Nature and of human nature we are surely warranted in including the moral as well as the physical mystery of good. For here again the darkness of the shadows bears witness to the brightness of the light. The sinfulness of sin may be allowed to be as bad as the Bible asserts, and as terrible as half the world's misery, resulting manifestly from moral evil, luridly shows. But that does not destroy or diminish the counter fact that, taken as a careful whole, the goodness of humanity is vastly greater than its badness. As in Elijah's day there were seven thousand times more faithful servants of God than he believed, so is there still, amidst all the crimes and follies of our 'advanced' civilization, an immeasurable excess of virtue over vice. Were it not so, indeed, society could not hold together. Great and tragic as is the mystery of evil, the mystery of good is immeasurably greater and more marvellous.

2. From this we may well draw one or two simple but far-reaching conclusions.

(1) Taking ourselves and our environment as a whole, there is abundant reason for believing in the overruling goodness of the Eternal God. Sir Henry Thompson, indeed, has told us how, from the agnostic standpoint, he has discovered universal beneficence in Nature. 'I was now assured, by evidence which I could not resist, that all which man with his limited knowledge and experience has learned to regard as due to supreme power and wisdom, is also associated with the exercise of an absolutely beneficent influence over all living things, of every grade, which exist within its range. And the result of my labour has at least brought me its own reward, by conferring emancipation from the fetters of all the creeds, and unshakable confidence in the power, the wisdom, and the beneficence which pervade and rule the universe.'[1]

We are glad that to so competent an observer such a conclusion should be possible. How much more should it be valid for those who neither are nor wish to be 'emancipated from the fetters' of the creed that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our Father also! For such a faith the witness of the Christ of the Gospels may indeed alone suffice. But it is an added inspiration of priceless value to be able to discern His goodness in the smiling buds of spring, in the fragrant flowers of summer, in the precious fruit of autumn; as well as to

[1] *The Unknown God*, 85.

recognize within ourselves the constant proof of His beneficence in every painless hour, in every thrill of happy emotion, in the boundless possibilities and incalculable actualities of pure pleasure which accompany our physical existence, and above all in the capacity for appreciating moral good.

(2) We find overflowing reasons for heartfelt thankfulness and trust every day of our lives. When to the thankful recognition of the all-surrounding good in Nature there is added the full assurance of the Christian gospel, as guaranteed to men in the life and character, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is not too much to affirm that we have as complete an equipment as reverent reason can expect for that whole conflict with the mystery of physical pain and moral evil which has harassed human life from generations long before the Psalmist even until now. And to this we must add another fact. For 'the mind that was in Christ' means always the reduction of evil to a minimum by prevention, as well as the development to a maximum of all human powers of healing and of help. Nor is practical sympathy its only method of comfort, for at the same time it inculcates a humility and a patience which open the 'eyes of our heart' to appreciate truths far more precious than the mere satisfaction of sensations. The very problems of pain which give us heartache become then as valuable, even as indispensable, to our higher nature as the intricacies and difficulties and discords of Beethoven are essential to the acknowledged grandeur and sublimity of his music. Tremble as we sometimes may, with fear or sympathy, in presence of passing clouds of the darkness that can be felt, there is never enough catastrophe to overwhelm the Christian mind, but only sufficient to call forth the best and uttermost of which it is capable. And even if, under some especial stress of surrounding storm, we lose all hope of comfort in the present, the boundless possibilities of the future yet remain. He who has fairly estimated the actual mystery of good which enwraps our world may well say, with Paracelsus—

If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day.

I will Remember

Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11.—'And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.'

The Psalmist had been in a clouded valley where the sense of God's presence and guidance had grown faint. He had been assailed by spectres of doubt and fear. But he saw his danger and resolutely grappled with it. He said to himself, 'This will not do, I am drifting away from my bearings'; God has not changed—the change is in me; 'this is *my* infirmity'; what shall I do? I will meditate on the years of the right hand of the Most High. If I cannot see God's power, and grace, and mercy in the gloomy present, I can at any rate contemplate them as they were manifested in the days of old; if what He is doing is dark and mysterious, what He has done is plain; 'I will remember thy wonders of old.' He takes a long look over the past history of his people, and reassures himself that they have been all along in the hands of God. He recalls the whole story and meditates on the wonderful way in which God had dealt with his nation when He led them out of Egypt, how He made known His strength among the peoples and redeemed the sons of Jacob and Joseph; how He had made a way through the sea, and had led His people like a flock. He muses on all this until he comes again into clear sight of the pole-star of God's changeless power and grace, and is able to set his soul on its true course again.

1. How needful for each one of us to remember the past if we, on our part, are trying to make of this life of ours what God intended the wanderings in the wilderness to be for His people.

There is a well-known proverb about not being able to see the wood for the trees. That describes a condition into which our spirit many a time sinks. The immediate things come too close to us. They press upon us and confuse us. We do not see that we are doing any good, or that we are getting any good. And so it becomes a necessity, which every serious mind acknowledges, that we in some way now and then stand back a little from our life and see things, and see ourselves, as we and they figure

in the larger plan. And it is not only with the hope of judging our daily ambitions and achievements by the test of some spiritual standard, that we need all of us from time to time to stand a little apart from our life and examine it. We need to do this in order to feel that we are, in a solid and true way, gaining in moral force, in spiritual vision; that we are not becoming cold in our love of the ideal; that we have not lost sight of the great sweep of God's purpose with this world and with us all. In short we need from time to time to stand apart from our own life and view it so far as we may in its entirety. We need all of us to detach ourselves so far as we may from our own immediate circumstances, even from our own circumstances as a nation. And why? In order that, looking over the wider field of our own personal history, and over the wider field of our national history, we may see God walking through the centuries, and thus acquire such a confidence in Him as shall fill us with thanksgiving and give us courage in face of any disheartening and immediate thing.

2. There are two ways, two methods, by which science makes known to us the reign of law throughout the physical world. What science quite fairly calls the reign of law, we, who are of the faith of Christ, call the presence of God. For us, wherever there is law, there is God; and one day the immense discoveries of the human mind will be annexed by the religious soul and will become materials for the psalms and hymns which will yet be sung in temples which will be built to the glory of the Everlasting God. Science has come by its great and beautiful results in two ways, which we might describe by calling them the way of the microscope and the way of the telescope. Science has built up its stupendous proof of the law-abidingness of this world, which for us means the control by God of this world, by two lines of observation and inference. It has examined some detail of the physical world, a dewdrop, the heart of a flower, or an atom, and there it has found the presence of a law which can be made plain to the reason of man, so that he can build upon it and anticipate further results. By this intent examination of the infinitely small, the human mind has been able to report to us, that there is no realm of created matter which is irrelevant and chaotic; but that, on the contrary, the smallest thing, even to the unimaginable atom of ether, forms part of a cosmos, is obedient to law—or, in our warmer phraseology, is in harmony with reason and supports our confidence in God.

¶ 'The older I grow,' says Alfred Russel Wallace, 'the more marvellous seem to me the mere variety of form and habit in plants and animals, and the unerring certitude with which, from a minute germ, the whole complex organism is built up, true to the type of its kind in all the infinitude of details. In my early unregenerate days I used to think that only material forces and natural laws were operative throughout the world. But these I now see are hopelessly inadequate to explain this mystery and wonder and variety of life. I am, as you know, absolutely convinced that behind and beyond all elementary processes there is a guiding and directive force; a divine power or hierarchy of powers, ever controlling these processes, so that they are tending to more abundant and to higher types of life.' [1]

And what science has proved in the least it has found also in the greatest. For what is the message to the devout spirit from the observations of Nature on the immense scale? What is the value for the devout spirit of the disclosures of astronomy, in which we see the regular and orderly procedure of bodies separated from us by intervals of inconceivable space? What is it but to assure us that we belong to a scheme of things which, indeed, is beyond us, but which lives and moves and has its being within the control of laws which are not foreign to the human reason? What is it but to confirm us in that confidence in God which takes the place in full-grown men of the faith of our childhood—the confidence that things are controlled, that they express a spirit, a reason, a mind; that the universe is a cosmos.

[1] *Letters and Reminiscences.*

And from this we go on to the great inference and protest that a cosmos cannot have chaos for its crown.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And Thou hast made him: Thou art just.

3. What science has done, in these very days to find law and God in things varying from the infinitesimal atom to the majesty of stars, the religious spirit is here called upon likewise to do. And in the same two ways, we are asked to re-establish and make surer and happier our confidence in God. We are to consider lovingly, carefully, tenderly, some little thing in God's dealings with ourselves, something so small, so delicate, that an outsider could scarcely have understood it even if we had told him—some motion of the Holy Spirit within our spirit, some rebuke, some hindrance which saved us from a sorrow, some encouragement when we were on the point of letting go—we are to cherish the memory of that delicate but unmistakable thing, and, because it at the moment meant God for us, we are never to let that proof of God fade and die. We are to see God in those almost imperceptible moments of light and shadow upon our souls.

And again we are to see God also, not only there, but in the great things, in those performances of God towards which a whole generation or a whole century is but one short step. We are not only to look in upon our most sensitive souls for proof of God, and ground for our confidence in Him; we are also to look away from ourselves. If we think of ourselves at all, we are to take the long view of all the way. We are to remember all the way by which we have come. We are to remember how time and again we thought that things were so bad we could never survive them. We are to remember all these things; we are here in spite of them all and by the help of them all. And we are not to be afraid to explain everything to ourselves by saying that if the light has never gone out in those gusts of contrary things, it can only have been because God sheltered the light with His hand; that if the Lord had not been on our side the dark waters had gone over our soul.

¶ Faith is not easily daunted. 'Do you remember,' it persists, 'how you once stayed in a little seaside lodging in a mean and narrow street? It seemed so squalid, you could scarcely be persuaded to go in and look; but when you got inside, you found that the back windows opened out upon the illimitable ocean. There is a back window in that prison of yours. It is called Memory, and it looks out upon the ocean of God's love.' Then the heart looks through the window of memory, and so escapes the clutches of doubt. We remember all the way the Lord had led us.[1]

Experience bows a sweet, contented face,
Still setting to her seal that God is true . . .
Nay, love lifts up a face like any rose
Flushing and sweet above a thorny stem,
Softly protesting that the way He knows.

But as we look forward we must not boast; we must not indulge in any foolish self-confidence. Neither must we say that things are bound to turn out in the very way that we should choose. We are ourselves to be faithful in all our relations, doing the will of God in the spirit of Christ, in every department of our life and influence, in home, in Church, in State, and as for the issue, we are to 'lift up our eyes unto the hills.' We are to 'remember the days of old,' and 'consider the years of many generations.'

While I see day succeed the deepest night,
How can I speak but as I know? My speech
Must be throughout the darkness: 'It will end:
The light that did burn will burn.'
. . . . .
So, never I miss footing in the maze.
No,—I have light, nor fear the dark at all.

[1] E. Herman, *The Touch of God*, 98.

The Secret Working of God

Ps. lxxvii. 19.—'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.'

1. The Psalmist is musing on that great historical event, the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites, and he is struck by the unexpectedness of the way in which God acted on that occasion. Mingling with all his other thoughts was this, that God has His unfathomable secrets.

We see this in the handiwork of God. It is true of life itself. Life is the one impenetrable secret. We have it, and yet the wisest knows not what it is. It is not only of the heaven of heavens that looking up we say, 'Thy footsteps are not known.' The deepest mysteries are not in heaven. The deepest mysteries are where we are, and know not what we are. Life looks at us in every human glance, and speaks to us in every human voice. Life meets us riotously in the play of children. Life shines transfigured on the face of saints. And yet what is it; so strong and beautiful, and yet so frail; so evident that none can pass it by; so hidden that no human hand can reach it? It baffles science with all its mighty claims. It baffles philosophy with all its pondering. No thought can get at it. No lancet reach it. No deftest hand can pluck it from its shelter. God's footsteps are in the temple of the heart, and yet His footsteps are not known.

And it is true of all God's gifts. The best gifts are always at our hand. And yet though they are here, they are not flaunting; they are by our side, but they are never showy. Think, for example, of the gift of love. In the darkest spot of earth some love is found. There is no man so brutal and so base but some one loves him; and yet how silent and how secret love is, hiding itself away from human eye, chary of uttering its depths in language. Our poets liken love to a flower. Yet love is not a flower of the field; but rather the treasure hidden in the field. And thousands cross the field and never see it; until at last, in the appointed hour, passes the traveller who understands. It is so always with the love of man. It is so always with the love of God. God's love is here, bedewing every thorn, shining on every hedge around the home. And yet how secret and hidden it all is—how meaningless to blind or holden eyes—till Christ has come, and led us to the glory of the Cross.

(1) This element of secrecy is evident *in the Providence of life.* Not with the sound of bell does God arrive, when the feet are at the turning of the ways. Over the silent sea the boat approaches, with some one in it predestined to be ours; but the oars are muffled and we hear it not, as it comes from the haven of the far away. Wearing the aspect of our usual hours, our great hours of destiny arrive. And life will never be the same again. In its music there will be other strains. We thought it was a common hand that touched us; we know now it was the hand of God. Life would be easy if providential hours declared themselves; if they met us radiant and with uplifted look, and crying, 'I am one of thy great hours.' But they never meet us in a guise like that, never betray their greatness by their bearing; we hear no sound of the approaching footsteps. When Abraham rested by the door at Mamre he saw three travellers drawing to the tent. They were but wayfarers, athirst and dusty, and he had no idea that they were angels. And it is always thus that the angel-hours come, wearing the garments of the undistinguished, and treading on the dusty ways of life. How many a noisy hour has passed away, whilst many a quiet hour has been a seed, and has rooted deep, and blossomed high as heaven. Yet it was borne upon the wind so noiselessly and fell so lightly that we never noted it.

(2) There is the element of secrecy *in God's approaches to the soul in grace.* This was a favourite thought with Jesus Christ. It is not in the whirlwind that the Kingdom comes, when it makes its lodgment in the heart. Christ will not strive nor cry nor lift up His voice in the streets—those steep streets that lead into the soul. The Kingdom comes as if a man should sleep, and the seed should spring up he knows not how. The Kingdom comes just as the leaven comes, and who so watchful as to see it rise? When Christ was born at the inn in Bethlehem choirs of angels were hymning in the sky. And when Christ comes again there will be sound of trumpet, and a light so bright that every eye shall see Him. But when Christ comes into the human soul He comes with voice so soft that none can hear it except the ear on which the message falls. The Kingdom cometh not with observation, and here for once the

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Kingdom is the King. He comes by the ways of happy memory, or over the green grass where love is sleeping, or down the secret avenue of hope.

Expecting Him my door was open wide :
Then I looked round
If any lack of service might be found,
And saw Him at my side :—
How entered, by what secret stair,
I know not, knowing only He was there.[1]

(3) There was this element of secrecy *in the life of Christ* when He was here on earth. God hid Him under the garb of poverty, and set Him amid the silence of the hills. When a *man* has a message which he burns to utter, we know the passion that rises in his heart. We know how the beckoning hand of London calls him, and how he is restless till he has reached the capital. But when *God* had a message He despised the capital, passed it by, and sent His Son into a secret place, where the wind was fresh upon the hills. There He was born, and men were in the inn, and they jested and drank, and knew not it was He. And kings were rioting, and scholars pondering, and armies marching with the imperial eagles. But not a whisper broke upon that riot, or hushed the play of the children in the streets, or fell on the legionaries with a sense of awe as at a greater captain than their own. Moving amid obscure villages, shrinking when men would hail Him King, craving for Bethany in crowded streets—*that* was the seal of the Divine procedure. The footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth were His, and yet His footsteps were not known.

¶ As a pure revelation of God Himself, the grandest the world has ever seen or ever will see, I bow down prostrate to the *Christ of Nazareth*.[2]

He might have come in regal pomp,
With pealing of Archangel trump—
An angel blast as loud and dread
As that which shall awake the dead . . .
He came not thus ; no earthquake shock
Shiver'd the everlasting rock ;
No trumpet blast nor thunder peal
Made earth through all her regions reel ;
And but for the mysterious voicing
Of that unearthly choir rejoicing ;
And but for that strange herald gem,
The star which burned o'er Bethlehem,
The shepherds, on His natal morn,
Had known not that the God was born.[1]

2. Can we discern the spiritual uses of this great element in God's procedure ?

(1) The secrecy of God *keeps us from being discouraged*. There are things that we are better not to hear, and God has the gracious strength to keep a secret. How often have we said in conversation, 'How I wish you had never told me that !' We put the word from us, and it comes again, and it rises from the dead when we least wish it ; and we are meaner, and we are ashamed, just because some one could not keep a secret. There are things that it was very good to tell, but life has been far harder since we told them. And that is why God is silent in His love, and will not speak although our hearts are craving. 'My father,' said Isaac, as they went up the hill, 'here is the wood, but where then is the lamb ?' Poor child, so wistful and so happy ; it would have been cruelty to have told him that. And so, with us who are but wistful children, speech may be cruel and secrecy be kind. When we reach the hilltop we shall see ; and seeing we shall understand.

(2) The secrecy of God *should give us hope*. There is hope for the world, and there is hope for men, when we can say, 'God's footsteps are not known.' The footsteps of sin and vice are always known. There is nothing unobtrusive about them. They leave their print of filthiness on every pavement and on every newspaper. And that is why so many men are pessimists, because these footsteps are before them, and they forget that God is also there—only *His* footsteps are not known. Let some man kill his wife in a drunken brawl, and we shall hear all about it in to-morrow's newspaper. But thousands of homes are very happy and wives are singing and children are at play. We must remember that sin is riotous and God is silent in His working, or hope will go and hearts will be embittered.

(3) And it is *meant* by God *to keep us faithful*. It is the pattern for our common life. Rarely are we summoned to great deeds. To many of us they never come at all. We make our journey by a quiet way, with crosses that are very com-

[1] T. E. Brown, *Old John and Other Poems*, 181.
[2] George Matheson.

[1] N. T. Carrington.

monplace, with duties that are very ordinary. There are blessings in a life like that. But there are hardships too. We miss the unsettlement and the excitement, the music and the cheer. And it is when, on that level road, we are a little disheartened and discouraged that we should recall the quiet and unobtrusive ways of God. When a man is famous his footsteps are well known, but he is not nearer God on that account. From the tiniest violet up to Jesus Christ God moves in mysterious paths. And if it is thus He lavishes His beauty, and makes His infinite sacrifice of love, we can be very near Him in our calling. So would we move apart, and never seek the clamour and the show; for love is not there, nor does the road to the Kingdom lie that way.

Not on the towering mountain-peak
Crest-crowned with fiery glow
Do men the earth's rich harvests seek,
But in deep vales below.

Not for some glaring high emprise
Seek thou far-soaring wings;
That faith is noblest in God's eyes
That bears a cross—and sings.

The Shepherd of the Sea

Ps. lxxvii. 19, 20.—'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.'

It is essential to our peace of mind that we be satisfied as to the rationality of life; that is, that life is ordered to some worthy end. We can never reconcile ourselves to the belief that Nature is the result of a 'fortuitous concourse of atoms'; that history is a flow of unrelated accidents; or that our private life is aimless, purposeless. We are never sincerely and deeply content until we arrive at the conviction that the world and life are dominated by a Providence that is wise, just, and good. Carlyle, writing to Emerson, makes this confession: 'My belief in a special Providence grows yearly stronger, unsubduable, impregnable.' Such a belief is essential to our peace of mind.

Revelation justifies our intuition, teaching everywhere that all creatures and events are subject to the will and purpose of an all-wise God. From the Book of Genesis to that of the Revelation we witness the evolution of an all-comprehending sovereignty; one that recognizes alike things great and small, and through a wise and just administration seeks the universal good.

Yet, in the face of the world as it is, of things as they are and as they ever have been, we find it difficult to maintain this faith. The actual facts of history and of contemporaneous life seem often in violent collision with our creed and greatly trouble us. From the very beginning history has progressed through the tumultuous, the destructive, the tragic; through the shipwreck of empire and the travail of ages. 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters.' The story of the race is long and sorrowful. It has paid a severe price for whatever it has gained. Nothing has come to it easily or cheaply. Not a cell in our brain but was fashioned in the furnace; not a trembling chord of our moral sense but was strung and tuned by the discipline of pain.

Such is the actual condition of things confronting us. Acknowledging the difficulty, let us see what solid ground remains for a confident faith.

1. *The Difficulty attending Belief in a Divine Purpose.*—If peace of mind is possible only whilst we assume that life is Divinely ordered to some worthy end, it must be allowed that the existence of such a heavenly will, guiding and compelling man to a definite and an adequate result, often appears doubtful. Darwin stated the case very fairly. The general aspect of the glorious universe made it impossible for him to believe in chance. 'Another source,' he says, 'of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason, and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty, or rather impossibility, of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity.' Again, in a letter to Asa Gray, he writes: 'I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from divine laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance.'

Is not this dilemma that of many thinking

men? Whilst they contemplate Nature as a whole they cannot do otherwise than admire its unity, magnificence, and goodness; yet they fail to reconcile 'each separate thing' with the general aspect. This, that, and the other detail are not in keeping with the larger and happier interpretation; they often seem directly to traverse it. But is there not a very real consolation and suggested hopefulness involved in this dilemma? The disturbing factor is the isolated detail, the general laws and their working being entirely satisfactory. The things that puzzle and pain are the exceptional details, not the essential, universal laws and their normal action. And is it not probable that these subordinate discords may be capable of an explanation that will leave free from the shadow of suspicion the good and perfect Will that is so conspicuous in creation?

¶ When a visitor to Rome ascends into the dome of St Peter's, he is surprised by the general coarseness of the mosaic with which it is covered—the material is rough, the inlaying without taste, the colouring devoid of delicacy or design. Yet, surveyed perhaps three hundred feet below, it is grand enough; the apparently crude and slovenly artistry becomes a vision of fair shapes and colours. The ornamentation of the dome was designed with a view to its being seen from the floor, and its imperfection is its perfection; for had the work been smooth and delicate, it would have proved an utter failure, whereas it is the crowning glory of the shrine. The conception of the whole thing evinces on the part of the artist the fullest knowledge, the truest genius, the completest mastery of his vocation.[1]

Darwin's perplexity was caused chiefly by the contradictions of the physical sphere; yet a corresponding difficulty is suggested by social experience and history. In the individual life we have the consciousness that, on the whole, things work together for good, yet many details are hard to bear and impossible to understand; and, whilst the philosophical historian finds sequence and progress in the history of the race, there are yet ugly, chaotic, and painful incidents to be explained. Here, once more, the main aspects are satisfactory; and if they are not always so clear and convincing as in Nature, we may remember how seriously the development of the Divine purpose in the fortunes of mankind has been disturbed and obscured by our ignorance, folly, and wickedness.

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Supreme Conquest*, 50.

2. *The Difficulty attending Belief in the Divine Wisdom.*—How the regulation of mundane affairs is consistent with rationality is by no means always apparent; again and again we fail to follow God's method. Contradiction, discord, abortion, failure, or what appears to be such, occasion us painful perplexity. Our reason is confounded, as, ages ago, was that of Job. Yet ought we, children of a day and knowing nothing, to be surprised that the universe exhibits works and movements surpassing our comprehension?

¶ When Michelangelo was in the midst of building St Peter's, the cardinals accused him of incompetence, and of destroying the work of his predecessors. But the artist declined to justify himself, and refused all discussion. He said, 'I am not obliged to communicate either to you or to any one that which I ought or wish to do. Your business is to look after the expenses. The remainder is my affair.' When the workmen complained, he replied, 'Your business is to build, to hew, to do joiner's work, and to carry out my orders. As to knowing what is in my mind, that you will never learn.'

But have we not the strongest reasons to confide in Him who stands within the darkness, ordering all things according to the counsel of His own will? The Old Testament is never weary of celebrating the wisdom of God as displayed in creation and providence; and the New Testament exults in the wisdom expressed in the nature and processes of redemption. Naturally our attention is more directly fixed on the spiritual aspects and aims of the Divine government, but we can never forget that the intelligence that presides over that government is as unerring as its design is sublime.

Modern knowledge has given us no reason to doubt the perfection of creation, rather the contrary. The devout and famous men who lived before us were awed by the immensity of the universe, entranced by its loveliness, and amazed by its perfection. Said Balzac, looking over the landscape, 'Oh! that is true literature; there are no errors of style in a meadow.' Some fifty or sixty years ago it was the fashion with scientists to criticize and depreciate the structure and operations of the physical universe. They discovered—or thought that they did—irregu-

larity, disharmony, defect, redundance, and failure. Lately, however, the tone of criticism has quite changed, and the grand old doctrine of Nature's perfection once more holds the field. Every day naturalists are discovering the functions of the most insignificant-looking organs. He would be a rash man indeed who would now assert that any part of the human body is useless.

¶ Sir William M'Ewen, Professor of Surgery in Glasgow University, had a peculiar accident case in which the appendix was so exposed that he was enabled to watch its behaviour, the result being that he discovered that it plays an unexpected part in the digestive process, and that from glands lining its interior a certain fluid is prepared, which is poured forth as required, and takes its part in the digestion of what has so far escaped the action of the other digestive fluids.[1]

3. *The Difficulty attending Belief in the Divine Justice and Goodness.*—Here emerges the bitterest problem of life. The sense of intellectual inadequacy and failure in the world's government is distressing, but when events offend our moral sense it is painful indeed. In spite of our conceit we are not altogether surprised that we cannot at once solve the intellectual difficulties which the universe suggests; but that force should prevail against right, duplicity against truth, and that innocence should be crushed by pride and truculence threaten despair. These dark days overtake the best of men in every generation, and they bemoan themselves as they lose sight of justice and goodness in the tumult and darkness. 'I remember God, and am disquieted: I complain, and my spirit is overwhelmed.' 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.'

Yet, even here, a little reflection may reassure us. That righteousness is the condition of the highest welfare of men and nations, and that God, by strange instruments and terrible visitations, brings this truth home to those in peril of moral corruption and ruin, are two great lessons enforced by revelation. Tyrants, wars, and adversities may be over-ruled by heaven to saving moral issues. Has not this method of arousing retrograde peoples, and stimulating them to a higher life, been followed through the centuries? The forty-third and fifty-first chapters of Isaiah explicitly teach that a purer national life may be made possible through national disaster.

¶ Writing of the thirteenth century, Douglas Carruthers observes: 'We in Europe scarcely realize the existence of the Mongols as a dominant factor in the world's history; it is difficult to believe that the Mongols once represented the greatest human force that Providence made use of to kindle the dying West into a new life.'

The Divine judgments have a constructive as well as a destructive side, although the former is the more likely to be overlooked. Whilst much is destroyed and suffered, the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness, and in this fact the severities of the Divine government find their justification. That war is essentially one of the direst curses that can afflict those who delight in it, revelation never fails to teach; yet God converts our tragic sins into instruments of moral awakening and incitement. And what is true in relation to the religious consequences of national calamity is equally true in relation to the overwhelming disasters which wreck individual prospects and appear so inexplicable.

¶ In describing the rare but terrible cyclones which periodically sweep North Queensland, E. J. Banfield writes: 'Nature is rational even in her most passionate moments. These twenty-year-interval storms comb out superfluous leaves and branches, cut out dead wood, send to the ground decayed and weakly shoots, and scrub and cleanse trunks and branches of parasitic growths. All is done boldly, yet with such skill that in a few weeks losses are hidden under masses of clean, insectless, healthy, bright foliage. The soil has received a luxurious top-dressing. Trees and plants respond to the stimulus with magical vigour, for lazy, slumbering forces have been roused into efforts so splendid that the realism of tropical vegetation is to be appreciated only after Nature has swept and sweetened her garden.'[1]

The living God is present and watchful over His flock in the days of storm and darkness, as in the days of prosperity and peace. It is in the storm that He is best understood; there especially does He reveal His strength and faithfulness and love. It is in the dark and

[1] D. B. Knox, *The Haunted Heart*, 52.

[1] *The Confessions of a Beachcomber.*

dangerous crisis that we best prove the saving power of the Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. The grandeur of the Lord Jesus is never so impressive as when He had the storm for a background. Let us not fear when the work and hope of years disappear in all-enfolding calamity. The Shepherd may be hidden, but He is there. He feeds and keeps amid foam and spray, as on green pastures and among the lilies. And in the hurricane that hurls the strength and glory of nations in the dust the Shepherd still controls, remembering mercy in judgment. His principles of truth and justice, His purpose of mercy and salvation, prevail. How full of anxiety, agitation, agony, is this Seventy-seventh Psalm! How full of thoughts of mystery, terror, and almost despair, and yet with that sweet, unexpected verse for its ending: 'Thou leddest thy people like a flock.' In the very heart of the black tornado the green hills of millennial years are in view upon which at last the Shepherd shall feed His flock.

Turning Back

Ps. lxxviii. 9.—'The children of Ephraim . . . turned back in the day of battle.'

'You cannot fight the French with two hundred thousand red uniforms,' was one of Thomas Carlyle's caustic sayings, 'there must be men inside them.' To be heroic when there is no danger about, to be valorous when there are no foes, and to turn back in the day of battle is to stain the honour with indelible shame.

But it is not only in material warfare that these shameful withdrawals and retreats occur. They desecrate campaigns of an even more sacred order. They are found in the quiet, lonely, unwitnessed road of individual duty and obligation. There are multitudes of men who walk that road with an air of contentment as long as the birds are singing in the branches, and the way is open, and the days are like the summer light which never changes into gloom. In such engaging circumstances duty is a recreation and delight. But let the song die away, let the sky be overcast, let the highway become a narrow defile, and let Apollyon with drawn sword straddle across the entire breadth of the way, and are there not multitudes who, like Timorous and Mistrust, decline the fight and seek their safety in turning back in the day of battle? Personal honour is all very well, but the price is too high when it demands the shedding of blood!

¶ Ekken, the Japanese philosopher, declares that 'if a man will not give his life for righteousness he does not know the relative values of righteousness and life.'

Similar retreats can be witnessed in the strenuous ways of social enterprise. It is easy to be a social crusader when the streets are draped with bunting, and the flags are flying, and the bands are playing, and the sunny favour of prosperity is shining upon the cause. It is half-amusing to remember what multitudes of friends the Salvation Army won to itself after its recognition by royalty. In civic honour and national good-will the Army now enjoys a 'glorious summer,' but it had a 'winter of discontent,' when its circumstances were grim and sombre, and its friends were feeble and few. But the real friends of any cause are revealed and known when its adversities are widespread and clamant. It is when a cause passes into the chilly season of unpopularity, it is when difficulties thicken about it that we discover the friends of a movement; and it is then that so many turn away.

It is not otherwise in the fields of spiritual service. There were many disciples who were quite willing to be at the side of the Master in the days when the streets were crowded with sympathetic multitudes, and palm-branches were waved as banners of triumph, and the air was rent with the cries of 'Hosanna!' But when the Lord began to speak of coming opposition, and the approach of suffering, and when palm-branches changed to staves, and jubilant hosannas to low mutterings of malice and conspiracy, when Calvary loomed in sight, 'from that hour many of his disciples turned back, and went no more with him.'

It will be well to confess honestly that our natural inclination is to shrink from difficulties, to have little or nothing to do with forlorn hopes, and to turn back in the day of battle. But let us look at these inclinations in the light of one or two great principles, and mark what we lose by such retreats.

1. To call out effort is as great a service to a man as to satisfy a want. Indeed we might

say that a ministry which does not encourage and elicit effort is an agent not of growth but of decay. We recognize this principle in the fields of education. It is now a general axiom that it is one thing to inform, and quite another thing to educate. A child's mind is not an empty bag which a teacher is to fill with as miscellaneous a burden as the crowded contents of a boy's pocket. A child's mind is a mysterious bundle of latent and delicate powers, and to educate is to entice these powers into effort, in order that by the effort the mind may make acquisition for itself of things that are worth possession. Now we elicit effort by presenting difficulty, and difficulty gripped and conquered marks a proportionate increase in positive strength.

Why not recognize the activity of this principle in spiritual education? When the great Teacher purposes the strengthening of His children, He calls forth effort by presenting difficulty. Our inducements come through our strivings. 'Work out your own salvation, . . . for it is God that worketh in you.' And so God's bounty sometimes falls upon man in the shape of a burden or a task. We prayed for power, and the answer came in the increase of difficulty, but in the enlarged difficulty was imprisoned the very power for which we prayed. And thus it happens that, if we turn back in the day of battle, if we shrink from difficulty and shirk the task just when it becomes stiff, we are ignoring one of the great principles of moral and spiritual growth, and in retreating from the difficulty we are renouncing our very possibility of higher and richer life. In these spheres, at any rate, the line of retreat is always toward impoverishment and death.

¶ A successful business man kept above his desk the motto, 'Do the hard thing first,' knowing, as every sincere person knows, that we are apt to shirk, procrastinate, and delay the most vital issues of life.

2. Life is first a sacrifice and then a miracle. Here is a second principle in the light of which we may be able to interpret the seriousness of these retreats. We too often seek to reverse the statement, but the inverse is not true. Not first a miracle and then a sacrifice, but first the sacrifice and then the miracle! And yet many of us are wanting the miracle before the sacrifice has begun, and in so wanting we are asking for a violation of the Divine purpose and order. Where life is careless and easy, miracles never occur. When the Church is listless wonders cease. But when life becomes sacrificial, when men and women dare and risk for truth and God, then wonders begin, and great and glorious happenings stagger the wondering hearts of men. Was it not so in the apostolic days? We cannot turn to any page which tells the story of those heroic days without seeing the red marks of constant and splendid sacrifice. And the consequence is that 'the acts of the apostles' are accompanied by the acts of the Spirit, and multitudes of men and women were mightily constrained into the love and fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. And not one power has been withdrawn. If we repeat the sacrifice we shall repeat the wonders, and the work of the Lord will be glorified. But if, when crises confront us which demand sacrifice, we turn our backs and retreat, we turn our backs upon miracles, and our Church life and enterprise become a dull and unawakening commonplace.

3. And the third principle, closely allied to the others, is this, that 'the Church of Christ lives by the achievement of that which is impossible.' The Church is not intended to busy herself in services which anybody else can do. We are to be distinguished by our engagement with the impossible—changing the leopard's skin, getting rich men into the Kingdom, converting armed peoples into brotherhoods, and proclaiming the evangel of grace to all. The Church lives for impossibles, and she lives by impossibles; and if she shrinks from these her own vigour will shrink and die. When the Church has faith and consecration enough to come to grips with impossibles she will by her very fervour change the temperature of the world. If the Lord puts before the Church some gigantic task, some towering Matterhorn of difficulty, and she turns away from it, she turns away from the very springs by which she lives, and by which alone she gains distinction, and she will lose herself in the rank and file of multitudinous societies and clubs which make no profession to bear the blood-red banner of our Lord.

¶ There is no ghastlier page in our missionary annals than the story of Lewanika and the Barotse people. Read Coillard's letters to

Arnot. 'I do not know what is in store for these poor tribes,' Coillard writes. 'The horizon is dark, and the sky very stormy; it seems as if we were witnessing the last days of the Barotse nation. . . . Liwanika has exterminated his enemies, even those whom he feared might one day become his enemies. I never saw such bloodthirsty people.' It is a grim and ugly story of ceaseless brutality, cruelty, and carnage. Yet a few years later that very chief, Lewanika, as a Christian ruler, represented his people, as a Christian people, at the Coronation of King Edward in Westminster Abbey, and went out of his way to show practical sympathy with all aggressive missionary enterprises.[1]

'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature' was one of our Lord's commands. Impossible, we say. And some are calling for retreat. Let us admit the gigantic task and then hear our principles again. The Church of Christ lives by the achievement of that which is impossible. How stands it, then, with this sound of retreat?

But is the execution of the orders beyond our resources? That is a reasonable question; but is that the way of the Lord, to give an order that cannot be obeyed? Does He command us to a task and then absent Himself? We know that is not the way of the Captain. He is on the field before us, and anticipates our coming. How, then, is it with our material resources? Have we reached the limit? Are all the friends of Christ giving all they might and all they can to the evangelization of the world? The simple fact of the matter is this, if we all gave just as we are competent to give there would be no need to retreat. It is a stiff task, but glory awaits us in its very severity.

¶ Speaking on missions Norman Macleod said: 'There are some people who are very careful that no one should know what they give. A very good principle, but used sometimes to cloak a niggardly spirit. They say that they wish the left hand not to know what the right hand does. I believe that if the fact were communicated, *the left hand would not be much better for the information.*' It does not read well, but with his Scotch accent and quaint manner, it had a most telling effect. . . . Then he went on to speak about the widow's mite. He said: 'I am wearied with hearing men talk about their mite. Let it be clearly understood. She gave *all* that she had, and when those who are always quoting her example have done the same, we shall have no reason to complain.'[1]

¶ When Mallory and Irvine were last seen on Mount Everest they were 'going strong for the top.' From that top, a thousand feet above them, nothing could turn them back.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 46.

Drink from the Depths

Ps. lxxviii. 15.—'He gave them drink as out of the great depths.'

The Psalmist is here reviewing the Providence of God that sustained the children of Israel in the desert. That Providence had made a deep impression on him, and he delights to dwell upon its wonders. For him the miracles that marked the Exodus were not isolated and solitary splendours. They were rather the discoveries of that power which is everywhere present and everywhere upholding; only in other lives they are writ small, while here in the Exodus they are writ large. Take, for example, the water from the rock, of which the Psalmist is speaking in the text. It comes to him in a flash, as the great wonder of it, that God gave them drink as out of the great depths. He sees the Israelites crowding around the rock, and saying in their hearts, 'This cannot last long.' He sees them watching for the supply to fail, as, of course, coming from a rock, it must soon do. And then he sees their look of wild surprise when it dawns on them that the stream is inexhaustible, and is fed by channels of which they know nothing. What the people crave for is a draught of water, and God in His mercy gives them their desire. But He fills their cups, not from a little cistern, but as from some boundless reservoir. And the Psalmist knows that that is always true; for whenever the Almighty satisfies His creatures, He gives them drink as out of the great depths.

Let us consider some illustrations of this truth.

1. *The World of Nature.*—There is not a bird or beast, there is not a tree or flower, but is ministered to in the way the text describes. Take the tiniest weed that roots among the stones and ask, what does it need to live; what

[1] *Memoir of Bishop G. H. Wilkinson*, i. 119.

does it need that it may flower and fruit? The answer is that it needs a little warmth; it needs an occasional moistening with rain. In a certain measure that is true, but we can never stop there in this mysterious universe. At the back of the warmth which it needs there is the sun; and at the back of every raindrop there is sky and ocean; and it takes sun and sea and the white cloud of heaven to satisfy that tiniest weed among the stones, which comes to its delicate beauty unregarded, and may be crushed by any passing foot. Try to explain the light that a rose needs, and one is carried into the depths of solar energy. Look at the raindrop on the hawthorn hedge—has it not been drawn 'out of the boundless deep'? And so there is not a rose in any garden, or a leaf that unfolds itself on any tree, but is ever whispering to the hearing ear, 'He gave me drink as out of the great depths.'

There is part of the sun in an apple,
There is part of the moon in a rose,
There is part of the flaming Pleiades in everything that grows.

Out of the vast comes nearness,
For the God whose love we sing
Lends a little of His heaven to every living thing.[1]

2. *Our Senses.*—Think, for example, of sight and hearing. One of the plainest facts about our senses is the different way they translate what they receive. To one man, as to the Peter Bell of Wordsworth, a primrose is just a primrose and no more. To another, in the meanest flower that blows there are thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. And it is not the eye alone that differentiates, it is the life that is hidden deep behind the eye. Or two men listen to a piece of music, and one, as he listens, is profoundly stirred by it. There seem to pass before him, as he listens, visions of what is high and fair and beautiful. He hears the calling of his brightest hopes, and the cry of regret for all his wasted years, and sees the stooping over him again of faces that he has loved long since and lost awhile. All this is kindled in some hearts by music; yet play that very piece before another, and it is sound and fury, signifying nothing. Is not the ear of a dead person perfect? Is not every membrane and convolution there? Yet call to it, or whisper to it passionately, will it play its part and carry the news of love? Yesterday there would have been a smile of recognition; there is not a flicker of response to-day. So at the back of every sense we have there is a deep that we can never fathom.

3. *God's Ways in Providence.*—Consider the ordering and discipline of our lives. One of the lessons we learn as we grow older is that our discipline is not exceptional. When we are young our joys are all our own; we never dream that others can have known them. When we are young we take our little sorrows as if there were no such sorrows in the world. Much of the bitterness of childish trial lies in its terrible sense of isolation. But, as life advances and our outlook broadens and we learn the story of the lives around us, we see that we are not alone, but are being made to drink of the great depths. It is not by exceptional providences that we live. It is not by exceptional joys that we are enriched. It is not by anything rare or strange or singular that we are fashioned under the hand of God. It is by sorrows that are as old as man, by trials that a thousand hearts have felt, by joys that are common as the wind that breathes on the palace and on the meanest street is common. By these things we live; by these we grow; by love and tears, by trials, by work, by death; by the things that link us all into a brotherhood. And it is when we come to recognize this truth that we say, as the Psalmist said of Israel, 'He gave us drink as out of the great depths.'

4. *The Bible.*—It is an arresting thought that though the Bible is such an ancient Book it is yet so intensely modern and practical. Think of the ages which have gone since it was written, and how 'heaven and earth have passed away' since then; think of our cities, and of the life we live in them, and of the stress and strain unknown in the quiet East; it is wonderful, when we reflect on that, that the Bible should be of any use at all now, and should not have moved into the quiet of libraries to be the joy of the unworldly scholar. But if there is one thing certain it is this, that the Bible meets the need of modern life. There is not a problem we are called to face, not a burden we are

[1] Dorothy F. Gurney.

forced to bear, but our strength for it is as the strength of ten when we make a daily companion of the Bible. We never find it offering us a draught from shallow waters. We do not find there a set of petty maxims, but the everlasting love of God. We do not find any shallow views of sin there. And that is the secret of the Bible's permanence—that for sin and sorrow and life and death and duty it gives us to drink as out of the great depths.

¶ 'The Bible owes its place in literature,' said Emerson, 'not to miracles, but to the fact that it comes from a profounder depth of life than any other book.'

¶ Discussing the art and influence of Ibsen, *The Times* declared that the Norwegian dramatist will have a deeper meaning for each generation—a meaning which the labours of modern students have done something to bring to light, but which future ages will certainly grasp more and more fully—a meaning which no changes in society or belief can put out of date. In a far profounder sense we claim that no changes in society or belief can put the Bible out of date. It is just as modern to-day, and just as living, as it was a thousand years ago, and as it will be a thousand years hence.[1]

5. *Jesus and His Words.*—If ever words were as water to a thirsty world, surely it was the words that Jesus spake. How simple they were, and yet how deep! How tender and full of love, and yet how searching! Now there are men whose lives so contradict their words that when we know the men we cannot listen to them. And there are men who are so much less than their own words that when we come to know them we are disappointed. But what people felt about Jesus Christ was that, when all was uttered, the half was never told; for at the back of all His words there was *Himself*, deeper unfathomably than His deepest speech. That is why the words of Christ will live. We can exhaust the cup, but we cannot exhaust the spring fed from the deeps. And just because the words of Jesus Christ spring from the depths of that Divine humanity, they will save and strengthen the obedient heart to the last recorded syllable of time.

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 22.

The Corn of Heaven

Ps. lxxviii. 24.—'He rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven.' (R.V.)

When the Israelites left Egyptian civilization behind them and plunged forward into the barren deserts of the Sinaitic peninsula it seemed at first as if they were doomed to starve as soon as their own flocks and herds were consumed. 'And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: and the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' Then, we are told, the Lord said unto Moses: 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.' And, indeed, Israel began to discover there in the desert altogether unexpected and inexplicable supplies of food that came like bread from heaven. Whenever the pinch of hunger and thirst was felt, some way was found to relieve it: water is struck from the very rock and bread falls down like dew. Hence, to their amazement, the Israelites found themselves alive month after month—alive and nourished in the midst of this parched wilderness; and the poets of later times, when recounting the precious incidents of the Great Deliverance, were moved to declare how men ate angel's food, how God provided His people with corn of heaven.

1. 'The corn of heaven.' What a lovely phrase it is! All the poetry of food in four words! Merely to say it over to oneself is like saying a grace. It arouses one to admiration at the perpetual miracle of food. It is like a Japanese poem—a single flash of insight expressed with the utmost verbal economy. The thing is said; and a vision of all the farm-lands and orchards and food-shops on earth rises before one as proof of man's utter dependence on God's bounty. We see all our bread as heaven's gift.

It is, indeed, heaven's gift. Yet our enjoyment of it depends upon our human energy. Our Heavenly Father does not pamper His children. Still the ancient principle abides:

'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' For it is only God's Spirit in man co-operating with God's power in Nature that brings increase of life and wealth and comfort. When we pray that God may give us our daily bread we are not to make our request as mere inactive recipients of a Divine bounty. The gift is conditional upon our co-operation with God.

¶ Dan Crawford, the African missionary, tells us that certain tribes among whom he laboured are skilled in carving in red mahogany, and that before starting the day's work they offer this prayer, 'O God, Thou hast made all things beautiful, but we must lend Thee a hand.'

2. There are two fundamental requisites in human society which condition the bounty of heaven toward us all: the first is work, the second is justice.

(1) Food can never be plenteous in a world of idlers; it can never be evenly distributed in a world of gamblers. The earth never fails us. Its supplies are inexhaustible. But only by God's energy in man, an energy of work and of brotherhood, can man be fed on this teeming earth. God answers our prayers through ourselves. God saves us through each other. When we pray to Him for food we are asking that a spirit of earnest industry and firm justice may be universally aroused in us to solve all the problems of hunger and nakedness and every bodily need of mankind. Our good-will in toil, our patient acquisition of new science, and our generous advance in comradeship, are the means of the fulfilment of our prayer. And these things are the working of God in us. An uninspired society, as a simple matter of fact, does not get its daily bread. Man, selfish and unregenerate, may look after his own needs; though he will not do even this adequately, but only wastefully and short-sightedly. But he will certainly not look after the needs of others. It is only as man is moved by the Holy Spirit that he will make the common good his objective, that he will be anything else than a scrambling, wasteful, selfish animal. And so long as he is this, large sections of society will be half-starved whatever riches are available; nor will the available riches be faintly approximate to the potential wealth of the earth. God's Spirit in man is demonstrably the only ultimate source of bodily welfare and of the mastery of Nature. It is precisely because we are so certain that all food is God's gift to us, the corn of heaven, that the Church makes a request for bread an integral part of its prayers—understanding that it is by prayer that the Divine Spirit enters into men, and that the Divine Spirit alone can successfully fight against hunger and destitution, and build up a society safeguarded in true wealth and health.

¶ A few years ago there appeared in one of our journals an article with the title 'The Ravens that Feed England,' which brings very vividly to one's imagination the human labour upon which our food supplies depend. This is its central passage: 'Famine cannot strike us; we are insulated from the physical disasters of the globe; we read of blights and droughts in this country or that, famine and pestilence that bring millions to starvation; but nothing ever happens to us. When the crops that supply us fail in one part of the world, what we need is always somehow obtained in another. We believe in our hearts that, whoever else goes short, England's belly will be full; the ravens will feed us. The ravens do feed us—prompt, obedient ravens, hurrying hither and thither on our business over all the world; smoky, blackplumed ravens of the high seas, converging upon us day and night, and perching on the rocky rim of our island; sooty ravens of the land, that come flapping and screeching through the darkness, bringing food from the shore to our very doors. The ocean tramps and the goods trains are the humble ministers to all the poetry and romance of our island life. The sorrowful, rusty tramp nosing her way through the surges, sliding in between the pier-head lights of harbours and gliding out again in the grey, rainy dawns, blistered by tropical suns, sheeted with winter ice, and always coming home again to England, burrowing along towards the Lizard or the North Foreland or the South Stack or St Abb's Head; and the goods train, more unlovely still—sooty, clanking chains that go dragging through the land day and night; halted for an hour at a time by some wayside signal-box to let the lordly pleasure-trains go by; broken up, marshalled, re-formed, banged about in switching yards, and bearing, nevertheless, the very elements and essence of our existence—there they are, and every one takes them for granted. They flutter their black wings through the night;

our table is spread in the morning; the ravens have fed us.'

The co-operative energy and wisdom of mankind, the holy spirit of service toiling to reap the earth's bounty and to distribute its gifts throughout the commonwealth—these are the instruments through which God's purpose is worked out. Nature offers her goods at a price. She demands incessant effort, endless dexterity of contrivance. She fails us here and there, in this way and in that, just that we shall not stagnate and let our powers fall into disuse. She conditions her gifts so that we are kept ever on the alert, ever prompted toward mental and moral growth. Man takes command of sun and wind and rain, and makes them serve his own purposes. He uses bottled sunshine to warm himself in winter; he makes the sun take pictures for him, run errands for him, and heal his diseases. He cages the rain in his reservoirs, and guides it through his aqueducts till wild flood and storm are tamed into bathroom attendants. But only after arduous effort and cunning wrestle of wit can Nature's treasures be thus exploited.

(2) But industry is not enough. There must also be brotherhood. We have learned to our cost in bitter times of war and war's aftermath that wherever good-will fails in society, wherever selfishness, fear and hate poison and paralyse human relationships, it will follow, as night follows day, that great masses of mankind will suffer the agonies of nakedness and hunger. We cannot flout God's laws with impunity. And His law is that mankind shall reap the fruits of the earth only by the twin principles of labour and justice, by unselfish effort in production and distribution. When those two principles guide society the corn of heaven is ours, and all are rich in common wealth. When either of those principles is disregarded, society remains impoverished, underbred, and inefficient—a half-baked scone, as Hosea said of Ephraim, overdone in wasteful luxury at one end and underdone in pitiful destitution at the other.

Hence our abiding need for that simple and fundamental prayer for daily bread, the prayer of that Church which is the holy fellowship of the faithful, through which God's will gets ministered to mankind. Only where God's Spirit is really incarnated can the hungry be fed and the poor enriched. But when His Spirit is present this blessed effect is assured and inevitable. For our God never fails us. 'Happy is he,' sang the old Psalmist, 'that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which executeth justice for the oppressed, which giveth food to the hungry.' It is literally and irreversibly true. He and He alone 'satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.' No other power does this but God working in the hearts and minds of men. And the only way to open up our human nature to His entry, till we embody Him more and more fully, is by prayer: the spiritual effort to bring our wills—so short-sighted and perverse and errant—into captivity to His will, which is utterly wise and good, and under the guidance of which we may all share a life that is life indeed.[1]

Leanness of Soul and the Bread of Life

Ps. lxxviii. 29.—'He gave them their own desire.'
Ps. cvi. 15.—'He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.'

THE people had been the subjects of a great experience. They had been delivered from bondage. They had been led in the daytime by a cloud, and all the night through by a light of fire. Their meat was the bread of angels. But they despised God's table. Their minds ran on the savoury dishes of Egypt. There is a sad irony in the picture of this wonderful nation moving onward towards a tremendous destiny, and its members murmuring at every hardship they encountered. But it is only an epitome of the human story with its Divine purpose and its tragedies of lost lives.

¶ 'Many that fare deliciously every day,' says old Matthew Henry, 'and whose bodies are healthful and fat, have, at the same time, leanness in their souls; no love to God, no thankfulness, no appetite to the bread of life, and then the soul must needs be lean. Those wretchedly forget themselves that feast their bodies and starve their souls.'

1. Jesus asks the great question, What shall a man give in exchange for his life? It is a question that goes straight home to the experience of every one. Our Lord is moving among

[1] L. Johnson, *The Legends of Israel*, 162.

the same circle of ideas as when He says, 'Is not the life more than meat?' Human life, He means, is the absolute standard in relation to which all material things are measured. Life itself has no exchange value, because it is by usefulness in promoting life that all worth is appraised. And the satisfaction that we derive from the possession of what is called wealth must be conditioned by the capacity of these things to promote or to retard well-being. No mistake is greater, as Bishop Butler points out, than to attempt to express happiness in terms of property, as though possession were in itself a sure guarantee of joy. A cargo of snow-shoes in a tropical climate, a kingdom to a stricken monarch who cries but for a horse to bear him from the battle, a wardrobe of costly dresses to a dying queen—such things are a mockery of wealth. It is our life that matters. That proposition only requires to be understood to win immediate assent. We may have very rudimentary ideas of all that life involves, of the meaning of that human soul which, nevertheless, is to us a priceless jewel, but we shall be in no real uncertainty as to the answer which must be returned to the question, What shall a man give in exchange for it?

The word which the Bible uses for the soul, and which is sometimes represented in English by the alternative 'life,' is the same which reappears in the science of psychology. What, we ask, are the laws, not of the outward universe, but of my own perceiving, thinking, determining self, the mind that reasons, the senses that feel, the heart that loves, the will that acts? And what a wonderful soul that is which reflection discloses to the reverent inquirer! What a well of life is there springing up out of depths which amaze us by their unexpected possibilities and affright us by their impenetrable darkness! We return from the shallow estimates which account a man's worth, if not by the extent of his fortune, at least by the measure of his poor achievement, to that standard of high if unfulfilled aspirations to which none of us is altogether a stranger:—

> Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
> All I could never be,
> All, men ignored in me,
> This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

2. We do not for one moment suggest that we are wrong in feeling the sting and pressure of desires which are the inevitable consequences of our manifold nature. So many are the points of contact between ourselves and our mother earth that each one of them becomes the gate through which some need seeks its legitimate satisfaction. It was not wrong that He who gave wine at the wedding feast should during His experience of the desert have desired to make stones bread. It is not wrong for men who live by bread to desire for themselves and for their children such competent means as shall secure them from the approach of famine or even the disability of domestic straits. We are abundantly justified in recognizing that there is a bread question, and that it is a reproach to Christian England that, while we have gone far with our inventions and discoveries to obtain a secure mastery over physical forces, we have not yet attained that combination of courage, intelligence, and unselfishness which by the due co-ordination of social forces shall mitigate the risk of recurrent unemployment. But woe be to the man, the family, or the nation that is content to satisfy these lawful desires, to pursue these legitimate ends, at the expense of the Life whereby alone each particular need is to be measured, and which always and in all circumstances is more than food.

¶ A man may pay too dearly for his livelihood, by giving, in Thoreau's terms, his whole life for it, or, in mine, bartering for it the whole of his available liberty, and becoming a slave till death. There are two questions to be considered—the quality of what we buy, and the price we have to pay for it. Do you want a thousand a year, a two thousand a year, or a ten thousand a year livelihood? and can you afford the one you want? It is a matter of taste; it is not in the least degree a question of duty, though commonly supposed so. But there is no authority for that view anywhere. It is nowhere in the Bible. It is true that we might do a vast amount of good if we were wealthy, but it is also highly improbable; not many do; and the art of growing rich is not

only quite distinct from that of doing good, but the practice of the one does not at all train a man for practising the other.[1]

Another human desire, which is not only lawful but is, surely, to be cherished in the best interests of our corporate life, is the desire for a sufficient opportunity of exercising our powers. Equality of opportunity is a familiar phrase, and it is because we believe in the natural inequality of men that we are anxious to preserve and to recommend this ideal of socialism. We may recognize the tact and wisdom of an archbishop, and yet surmise that, but for the disabling power of circumstance, some obscure teacher in a remote village might have fulfilled Augustine's chair with a yet more conspicuous success. We are bound, therefore, to see that the barriers which prevent the full use of each man's capacities be not such as it is possible for us to remove. But let us not forget that too often the withering of the spiritual life, the provoking of the Lord our God, accompany the grant of opportunity, and invest with terrible significance the legend that may with truth be inscribed over many and many a brilliant career—'He gave them their desire, and sent leanness withal into their soul.'

Then what joy is there more pure than that which is the portion of those who have a genius for fellowship? What possession gives a satisfaction more unalloyed than troops of friends? Its acquisition has been cultivated in every age as a fine art. No kingdom is more world wide than that which falls to him whom all men love. But it is easier, as Bishop Forbes was wont to say, to win hearts than to save souls. It was by no genial courtship of mankind that Jesus our Saviour gained that universal empire which is His by right. Rather it was with Calvary full in view that He proclaimed the royal word, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' If in those human relationships, which are the tenderest and most beautiful of all earthly associations, we are not prepared to make conscience the judge and arbiter of all our intercourse, if we forget that stern self-discipline which can alone protect our dealings one with another by sincerity of purpose, truth of action, and purity of thought, then we shall find that what seemed to us the most substantial of all goods is but dust and ashes; that we have gained but the hollow friendship of the world, which is enmity against God; and that He has given us our desire, but sent leanness withal into our soul.

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.*

3. But what if we have the simple courage to believe, with the plain man who trusts the inward voice, that our life is capable of an infinite satisfaction, and can be fulfilled only from an inexhaustible well? Why is it that we require so many disappointments before we are brought to the sad acknowledgment that we have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and have been spending money for that which is not bread? 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of' were the words of the Son of Man to His amazed disciples when they found Him by the well in converse with the woman of Samaria. 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work.' That was the bread of God, the heavenly manna wherewith He was sustained throughout the days of His pilgrimage. 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee; my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.' Such is ever the triumphant faith of those who, amid the pain and weariness of the world, know the secret of victory. And they who through the reconciling presence of the Son have found in God their eternal stay listen to the Voice which cries, 'I am the bread of life. Whoso cometh to me shall never hunger. He that believeth in me shall never thirst.'

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
'Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?'—
'Bravely!' said he; 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread*!'

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home. [1]

Limiting God

Ps. lxxviii. 41.—'Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.'

In the Seventy-eighth Psalm occur these challenging words: 'They limited the Holy One of Israel.' The thought of the writer is clear. He believed that God was the deliverer of Israel and the expander of its destiny. There was no knowing how far He would have taken His people, but again and again 'they limited Him.' The whole of the Psalm oscillates between these two great ideas—God delivered man; but man limited God. He brought them out of bondage, dividing the sea, guiding them by cloud and fire, cleaving the rocks to give them drink. But they sinned against Him. They never took account of God. Not even their experience of His power at the Red Sea, or His goodness in providing them with manna availed to make them trust Him in difficulties.

It is characteristically Hebrew, but it is also deeply human. If we call up the spirit of any great reformer, any noble pioneer, he would tell us that the things he fought for with high idealism were defaced by the gross appetites of those for whose sakes he had striven and suffered. The mightiest men in history have had to say of their fellows, 'They limited me.'

This is a fault to which we are all prone. In all sorts of ways we are tempted to set limits to the Holy One of Israel—limits to His love, to His claims, to His purposes, to His power. We have narrow thoughts about God, contracted conceptions of Him, petty and inadequate ideas of Him. We stake out a field in which God is supposed to act, and outside that field we do not expect Him to act at all. Now you can never have a big life with a small idea of God. And the limitations we set upon our thought of God react upon us in littleness of life, narrowness of outlook, and meagreness of power. There is nothing we need for our own comfort and good, nothing for our own courage and power, more than emancipation from all the limitations we set upon the Holy One of Israel.

1. We set limits to the sphere within which God acts and rules. We limit Him to *Sunday and Sunday observances*, and forget that the home is His house and the office is His house, and the council chamber is His house and the playground is His house. Every place is His house; every day is His day. He is Lord of the whole of life.

¶ Lord Melbourne, the first Prime Minister of Queen Victoria, is said to have exclaimed, as he came out of church, in stern disapproval of a sermon he had just listened to, 'Religion is all very well but it's getting a bit too far when it claims to interfere with a man's private life.'

Take the antithesis men so often make between religion and business. 'Business is business,' they say, 'and religion is religion.' It is a pernicious sophism. It is an absolute perversion of the truth. We might put the truth this way: religion never begins to mean business till it makes business religion. Religion is not simply worship—it is life. It affects not only our relations to God, but our relations to our fellows. And until we have begun to do God's will in the ordinary business of life we have not begun to be religious at all. What the world wants to see is religion at work, religion running through all, religion making men love their fellows because they love God, religion transfiguring life into a ministry. Lord of our life—no part of it withheld from conscious consecration.

¶ 'There is one proposition,' said Mr Gladstone, 'which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that a man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are daily tempted to that great sin.' What did Gladstone mean by that? He immediately adds, 'To speak of such a thing seems dishonouring to God; but it is not religion as it comes from Him, it is religion with the strange and evil mixtures which it gathers from dwelling in us.' [1] And that is the heart of the trouble. A religion which separates itself from life, which is formal and official instead of being real and vital, imperils

[1] Matthew Arnold.

[1] Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, ii. 185.

the foundations of common morality. As long as we are content to treat our religion in that way, its place in the practical concerns of life will inevitably be that of an interloper, intruding and interfering where it does not belong. There was, indeed, much truth and homely wisdom in the advice which young David Livingstone received from his grandfather when he left Blantyre for the old College at Glasgow: 'Dauvit, Dauvit, make your religion an every-day business of your life, and not a thing of fits and starts.'[1]

¶ Recently a valued member of the House of Commons retired from Parliament that he might devote himself to the advocacy of profit-sharing and labour co-partnership, as a solution of some of our social and industrial problems. He introduced these systems into his own business twenty-three years ago, and in that time has distributed no less a sum than £247,000 in profits among his employees, proportionately to their wage and having regard to their period of service. The word Brotherhood is on every lip, and in every newspaper. It is not yet equally evident in practical life. The man who recognizes that one is his Master, even Christ, may not find this easy of expression in office or factory, but if he honestly tries, he will be doing more for real Brotherhood than a crowd of platform or pulpit orators, or press writers.[2]

2. We are inclined to limit *the scope of His salvation.* We think of salvation as individual. Of course it is individual, but it is social as well. Christ clearly contemplated not simply the rescue of this man and that, but also the establishment of a Kingdom of God. That has been perhaps the most important practical discovery of the past few years—the discovery that there are social implications to the gospel, that the mind of Christ has to be applied to industry, to commerce, to politics, to everything that concerns the commercial life of men. In insisting that the gospel has this social side to it men are right. And when they tell us that religion has nothing to say to industry, the relations between employers and employed, the economic constitution of society, and the relations between nations they are simply trying to put limits on the Holy One of Israel.

[1] D. S. Mackay. [2] W. H. Somervell.

3. We are often tempted to set limits to *the working of His Spirit.* In the matter of the revelation of truth, for instance. 'We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind,' says one of our hymns. But that is exactly what we do. We treat truth as if it were a finished, completed, ascertained thing. And truth is not that—it is a living, growing, ever-expanding thing. We treat it as if the revelation of it were given only to men of a past age, and as a matter of fact it is being revealed to men to-day. It is thus an ever-growing and expanding thing, because the Spirit of God is at work, illuminating the minds of men and enlarging their hearts. We should have saved ourselves much distress of mind, and many a shameful page would have been omitted from the pages of the Church's history, if Christian people had recognized the truth of the continued operation of the Spirit. Instead of that they have set limits to His working. They have often sought to make the ancient creeds the test of truth. No doubt the Spirit guided the Fathers who formulated the creeds, but He didn't finish teaching and guiding them in the fourth or fifth centuries.

¶ Your creeds, composed hundreds of years ago, whatever else they may be, cannot be exhaustive or accurate or final statements of truth, nor can you ever have any creeds which will be.[1]

> And still the measure of our needs
> Outgrows the cramping bounds of creeds;
> The manna gathered yesterday
> Already savours of decay.[2]

All truth is of the Spirit, even what we call historical or scientific truth. The new knowledge of history, the new knowledge of science—it is all an illumination of the Spirit, and by the modifications in the form of belief necessitated by the new knowledge the Spirit is leading us into larger truth. 'He must onward still and upward, who would keep abreast with truth,' just because the Spirit is still at work. And we limit the operation of the Spirit by confining His working to certain types and classes of men, on the assumption that the Spirit can work only through certain channels, along certain lines. But the Spirit, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth, and we

[1] H. R. Haweis. [2] Whittier.

can hear the sound thereof. We can discern its Presence by its effects. And when we look for the 'effects' of the Spirit, we see them everywhere. 'Who was I?' was the challenge Peter addressed to the Jerusalem Council when defending his action in baptizing Cornelius. 'Who was I, that I could withstand God?' It is a challenge which every sectarian has to face still.

4. We are often tempted to limit *God's love.* 'We make His love too narrow, by false limits of our own,' says Faber. And so we do. We have done it by our systems of theology.

¶ Smith in his monograph on William Carey speaks of 'the spurious orthodoxy, miscalling itself Calvinism, which, at one time, smote the churches of England and Scotland with a blight.' He points out that there was a false predestinarianism, which did more to kill the church at home and to paralyse the few who would have covered the earth with it than all the recognized heresies put together. And what was this false predestinarianism? Well, we see it as in a sudden flash of lightning in the remark of the chairman at a ministers' meeting, when the little cobbler of Little Hackleton proposed that he should go abroad as a missionary. 'Sit down, young man,' thundered the chairman, 'when God desires to convert the heathen, He will do it without you or me.'[1]

But the love of God knows no limits. Christ did not shed His blood for some compassable number of elect; He died, as Paul puts it in His sweeping and uncompromising way, for *all.* We have emancipated ourselves from the narrownesses of Calvinism, but in other ways we are inclined still to set limits to God's love. We are inclined to leave certain people to their own religious devices, to leave the Indian to his Hinduism and the Chinaman to his Confucianism and the Arab to his Muhammadanism—as if God didn't love these people. That is really what those are doing who partition the world between Jesus and other teachers—they are setting limits to the love of God, a love which reaches out to all. Let people go back to Christ Himself, and let them listen to His voice. In His gospel there was ever the note of the universal. Before the Cross He said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' And after the Cross He said, 'Go ye and teach all nations.'

[1] D. C. Mitchell, *The Nonsense of Neutrality*, 146.

¶ Writing home from the *Iron Duke* during the war, Hilton Young paid this tribute to the boundless generosity of His spirit.

I was born in Marlborough,
And love the friendly faces there,
But for all other men beside,
'Tis little love I have to spare.

I would not mind to die for them,
My own dear downs, my comrades true,
But that Great Heart of Bethlehem,
He died for men He never knew.

5. We are often tempted to set limits to *God's power,* and that is why we are depressed and discouraged, and why we are also so actually weak and ineffective. This tendency to set limits to God's power has been accentuated by the modern scientific stress upon the uniformity of Nature and the discovery that the processes of Nature take place in accord with certain regular and constant laws. But if we, by our will, can suspend and counteract the laws of Nature, we may not say that God cannot. The question of miracle is not to be settled in that *a priori* way. The question of miracle is one of evidence. And it is not only the wonderful things related for us in the Old Book, but things that happen still, that prevent us putting any limits upon the Holy One of Israel. And especially in the matter of the mightiest miracle of all, that of man's regeneration. We are tempted oftentimes to despair of people. They are so abject, so sunken, so desperately vile, that we see no chance for them. But we have no right to despair. There is nothing too hard for God. And the same challenge comes to us when we confront the great problems of life. Left to ourselves we might despair of a time of universal peace and goodwill. But let us set no limits to the Holy One of Israel, but believe that the day is at hand when men shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and shall learn war no more—for there is nothing too hard for God.

Great thoughts about a great God—there is nothing we want more. We cripple and maim ourselves by our small ideas about Him. Life can never be a big thing for us if we limit God's rule to a section of it. Our Christian service can never be eager, confident, effective, if we set limits either to God's love or to His power.

New and ample conceptions of God are what we want most.

As wider skies broke on his view,
God greatened in his growing mind;
Each year he dreamed his God anew,
And left his older God behind.
He saw the boundless scheme dilate,
In star and blossom, sky and clod;
And, as the universe grew great,
He dreamed for it a greater God.

The Forgetfulness of God

Ps. lxxix. 8.—'O remember not against us former iniquities.'
Jer. xxxi. 34.—'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'

We have here man's cry for pardon, renewal, restoration and God's answer—willingness and power both to forgive and to forget.

1. *Man's Cry for Pardon.*—What is this sense of sin that pursues man so persistently? It is an indication at once of man's grandeur and of his impotence. God and Nature seem at strife within us. All that we should be, all we might have been, rises upon us in clear, tormenting vision; then what we have been and what we are gives this the lie, and torments us.

The pleasures of memory have inspired poets—all but the greatest—oftener than its pains. But memory, if it has its Beulah land, has also its valley of humiliation; and the greatest of poets have not forgotten this. How to remember—that is a process which, with much pain and weariness, we strive to master in our schooldays; but how to forget—that is an accomplishment which not a few of us would fain master in after-life, but cannot. When the Psalmist cried, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest,' he may have thought that what he wanted was to get away from his circumstances; what he really wanted to get away from was himself. And that no man can do. The greatest of poets have not forgotten this. It is the central motive of many a Greek tragedy. It is the undertone that runs beneath the music of the Psalms. In modern literature it produced that classic poem of remorse 'Eugene Aram.'

¶ Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were the victims of inability to forget; he, by day, in his waking moments, she, at night, in dreams and nightmares, were pursued by the undying ghost of Banquo, which was but the objectified image of their own conscience, as it drove its shadowy sword into their inmost hearts till he cried: 'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!' and she wandered about in her sleep, striving in vain to wipe the blood-spot from her hand.

Memory may sleep, but it never dies. It often seems capricious, depending as it does partly on laws we cannot control. Men are always liable to sudden awakenings, during which the past opens its graves, and the sea of forgetfulness gives up its dead. The first effect of God's Spirit on our souls is the sudden revival of the thought of our sins in lines of fire and tongues of flame. The first result is to drive us to despair at the thought that nothing we can now do will undo what once we have been; the second ought to be to drive us into the arms of hope, by seeking refuge where alone deliverance can be found—the atoning mercy and love of God our Father through Christ our Saviour.

But we can bear many memories, if we think they are only our own, safely locked up in our own bosoms. But there is another Consciousness than our own; other than that of the whole human race—a universal Consciousness; pure as the light, holy as holiness itself can be; which holds all that has ever happened to us and within us in its grasp—which never forgets. And thus, if human memory were really to fail, the Divine memory would still remain; and that is no mere passive, careless, indulgent thing, but the incarnate conscience of the universe, quick to resent iniquity, and unfailing in its reaction against it. The thought of this tremendous cosmic memory is one of the precious safeguards of goodness in the universe; it is the ultimate bar of judgment at which all good and evil must receive their verdict; it is the true corrective of an easy-going optimism as regards the issues of wrongdoing. There is no escape not only from God's knowledge of the present but from His memory of the past.

2. *The Transformation of Memory.*—We long for forgiveness; but 'forgive and forget' is the only complete and satisfying forgiveness. 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my

transgressions'; 'remember not against us former iniquities.' 'We cannot destroy the record of the past—can God?' That is the question.

Now, strangely enough, but unmistakably, there are, even in the Old Testament, abundant suggestions that the despair into which we are thus thrown proves our sure refuge, for there are assurances that this prayer is answered. God can and does forget sin, in a real sense, as well as forgive it. 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' And in our text we are told with equal clearness, 'I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more.'

Let us begin by emphasizing this unquestionable fact—that God Himself cannot undo what once has been done. As an infinitely good and holy Being, He cannot say that anything which has once happened has not happened, that a sin actually committed was not committed. Nor can it mean that God ignores sin. Sometimes a man in authority professes to ignore certain breaches of rule for expediency's sake; as a man he knows that they took place, as an official he pretends that he does not. Or sometimes we agree to say, 'Let us forget such and such a thing,' and we turn our minds to some other thought or fact which absorbs our whole attention. In not one of these senses can God be said to forget sin. God's official character is His real character; and so we see that it would be impossible for Him to condone anything, or ignore it, or treat it as though He knew not of it. We shall not come into any satisfying faith in the forgiveness and forgetfulness of God till we realize that all this reality of sin remains, and must remain, for ever; and yet that forgiveness and forgetfulness are both real. What we have to realize is that a fact may remain, and yet that it may be so transformed by a new relationship that its meaning is completely altered. Let a great wrong be done, but let the temper and attitude of wronger and wronged be changed, and that which once separated the two into hopeless antagonism and enmity may become a link to bind them more firmly than ever into one. Thus the memory of the wrong that once divided the two, instead of separating them, may help to bind them into one; it is no longer a mere memory of wrong, but of something which, however evil, has been used by forgiving love as its greatest opportunity and its noblest triumph.

The conditions for such a transformation of memory as this are twofold. There must be a clear manifestation of willingness to be reconciled on the part of the one who has been wronged, and as clear a proof of repentance on the part of the sinner. And there must at the same time be a clear vindication of the law of right which has been outraged.

¶ As a young man visiting Naples Mr Hawksley was sickened, as many have been, at the horrible treatment of beasts of burden in the streets; but he did what no one else thought of doing: gave up a life of opulence in England and devoted himself to purging the city of this evil. The story is thrilling if fully told. He with difficulty secured convictions against cab drivers, etc., who thereupon set upon him, stabbed him in thirty places, and left him for dead in a back street, fortunately on a tram-line, else he would have been ignored and have bled to death. His life was just saved, and with splendid forbearance he gave no information against his assailants, who then became his allies and helpers in the good cause. The whole tone of society in Italy has been permanently raised by this one man, who told me these facts, and many more, in the nineties.[1]

3. *The Reconciling God.*—The Cross of Christ bears eternal witness to what God has in and through it done for the race. We can see all the rigours of the Divine holiness bent in utter willingness as the Saviour dies on the Cross, and joining hands with the Divine love in its glorious outreach towards the world's salvation. The Cross of Christ is the furthermost point in the journey of heavenly love in seeking to bring back the lost; a love that bent all the Divine attributes (as the earth is bent into an orderly orbit under the stresses that carry it round the sun) into a perfect circle of reconciliation. And so when man, recognizing this miracle of atoning love, repents, and is reconciled to God, the result is a moral forgiveness, which is also in a true sense a moral forgetfulness. What matters it now if the mere fact of sin can never be erased? A better thing has happened, for it has been transformed.

[1] E. Lyttelton, *Memories and Hopes*, 312.

The Valley of Baca

Ps. lxxxiv. 6.—'Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well.'

The Prayer Book version of these words is a little different: 'Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well; and the pools are filled with water.' Let us keep both versions in mind.

1. The Vale of Baca or the balsam-trees was some vale which, like the Vale of Elah or the terebinth, and the Vale of Shettim or acacias, took its name from the trees which grew there. Balsam-trees are said to love dry situations, growing plentifully, for example, in the arid valley of Mecca; and this is clearly the point of the reference. Authorities are not agreed as to the exact location of the Valley of Baca, but it was clearly some waterless and barren valley through which pilgrims passed on their way to Jerusalem. The thought of the Psalmist thus becomes one of touching sweetness and suggestiveness. The Valley of Baca is a desert place, but the spiritual man, the man of faith, is able to draw from such arid experiences their hidden meaning, and to make the desert 'rejoice and blossom as the rose.'

¶ It is said that the colony of British Columbia, on the Pacific slope of the Rocky Mountains, contained at one time a number of cañons, or deep valleys, which were entirely devoid of verdure owing to the absence of water. The soil was rich enough to grow anything, but owing to this particular lack it presented the appearance of a barren wilderness. But within comparatively recent years certain lusty pioneers have come along who have bored deep shafts beneath the arid surface of these various valleys and come upon the much-needed water-supply, with the consequence that, one after another, these scenes of death have been filled with luxuriant life and beauty.[1]

The lesson of the Valley of Baca, then, is the turning of sorrow into joy. There are two theories about this thing: one we may call the theory of compensation, the other the theory of transformation. To many Christians heaven and the eternal happiness present themselves under the guise of the compensation theory. This world is the great 'down,' the next world is to be the great 'up' which is to make it good. The Christian suffers now to be rewarded then. This world is miserable; we must wait for our happiness, and struggle on with tight lips and torn feet to find it in the next. This would be the idea under which the pilgrim through the Vale of Baca would not turn it into a well, but only be kept up through it by far-off visions of the waters of salvation which, when he got to Jerusalem, he should find flowing out of the mount of God. It would make earth not a foretaste, an earnest, but only a discipline of heaven. Whatever truth there may be in it, it evidently is not the whole or the best truth.

2. See how different it is from this other theory of transformation. The pilgrims going through the vale of misery 'use it' for a well. They were looking forward to Jerusalem. Their hearts leaped, as every traveller's must, when any greener spot promised them a richer resting-place; but their life was not one altogether of the future, not kept distressed and anxious with uneasy alternations. They made the vale itself a well. It was not simply a sorrow that was succeeded by joy, not merely a peace promised and looked for and waited for, it was a peace found. When they grew thirsty they looked, not merely farther on into the heart of the future, but deeper down into the bosom of the present.

The very drawing of this picture must describe to many a soul its own unspoken need, and make it recognize it. 'Yes, that is what I want. Heaven is glorious, but it is far away. To-morrow may be all steeped in sunshine; but meanwhile to-day is dark. There surely must be something better to do than to sit down and wait. What is it?' We all feel that a religion which lives only on the future, dwells only in the future, cannot be a wholly efficient faith. What the world needs is present work, and what all men need are present working conditions, a present life. Hope is a splendid power, but we can hope intelligently only as we already taste some intimation of the thing we hope for; we can strive after the streams of Zion only as we strengthen ourselves out of the wells of Baca.

¶ He took his pain and all the trials of his days, and said, 'They say there is a better land, but it is hard to believe.' Thus he was a true

[1] R. J. Campbell, *New Theology Sermons*, 262.

pilgrim, for it is only stupid people who think that the vision of the loveliest city in the loveliest land dims the pilgrim's eyes to the fair beauties of this world. He did not make the most of two worlds; but as he lived to be worthy of that city with foundations, God counted him worthy to find along the dusty road of traffic and toil and pain the well of deep joys which only the true pilgrim can discover. These wells were at many stages of the day's road: he found one deep spring of pure, sparkling water in the morning reading of the Bible and hymn-book; another when his hands were clasped in prayer.[1]

Things are what they are used for. The artist uses a stone, and it is a statue; the mason uses a stone, and it is a doorstep. And beyond mere Nature. See how we use men. We are each other's raw material. Each man makes of his neighbour that for which he uses him. Why is it that two men both know another man of rich and gracious nature, and one gathers and makes out of him nothing but envy, and jealousy, and discontent, while the other shapes into his own life a largeness, and sweetness, and fineness, like that with which he has to deal? Why, except that the determining power lies finally, not in the one identical character of the man who is used, but in the two different natures of the men who use him? So of all influences and motives. The same educations press upon two lives. One rises on them into greatness, the other drags them down upon it and is crushed beneath them into ruin. How is it that men use God and make of Him such different things; grow by their use of Him to saints or devils? How is it that the Pharisee and the Publican came down the same temple steps, one cold, and proud, and bitter, and the other with his heart full of tenderness, and gratitude, and humblest charity?

Man, the savage, is ruled by things—rivers, hills, forests; they make of him what their own tendencies suggest. And on the other hand, man the citizen, man civilized, rules things, makes of them what he pleases. Now, let this great user, man, this one moral force, be called upon to go down into the valley of Baca, into the vale of misery. He finds there all the circumstances of suffering, poverty, sickness, bereavement, sin itself. What then? These are things and he is man. Let him rule them, not be ruled by them. Let him take down there a religious, trustful nature, and there is more promised than just that his cheerful piety will be able to carry him through; he will exercise his human right of ruling and of using these, and he will come out with a more perfect joy and a more certain faith than he had carried in. He will not come out half-dead with thirst, just able to drag himself up to the fountain at the end, but it will be as the Psalmist so beautifully says, 'He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head.'

3. There is something very beautiful in the truth that suffering, rightly used, is not a cramping, binding, restricting of the human soul, but a setting of it free. It is the breaking in of a prison wall. This is the thought of those fine old lines of an early English poet:

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.
Stronger by weakness, wiser men become
As they draw near to their eternal home.

How many battered cottages have thus let in the light! How many broken bodies have set their souls free, and how many shattered homes have let the men and women who sat in darkness in them see the great light of a present God!

¶ The Hon. Mrs Alfred Lyttelton has described her experience as she knelt by the body of her dead little son: 'I passed through one of those strange experiences of intense emotion, which seemed for a moment to pierce the surrounding darkness with a shaft of light. I suddenly became aware, in a far more acute form than ever before, of influences which indeed are always about us, but of which I had lost consciousness in the absorptions of a full and happy life. . . . I was like some one coming up out of a pit into the light of day with a treasure in my hand. For now I believe in the spirit, and from that is springing a belief in many things taught by those who can see God in the world. The world of spirit, the communion with something we call God, is a living, vital reality to me, the very breath of my being. I could not endure life without it.'[1]

[1] *Love and Life; The Story of J. Denholm Brash*, 198.

[1] *Life of Alfred Lyttelton*, 270, 329.

We have spoken thus of irresponsible suffering only; but in a far nobler way it is true of the responsible suffering which comes of sin. This is the hardest to believe, but it is what we need to believe most of all. Beyond all suffering which comes by natural dispensation or by human weakness there is another which exceeds them all. A man loses his friend and he is sorry, he loses his property and he is crushed, he loses his health and he almost gives up; but there is a yet untasted woe of which that man knows nothing yet. Let that same man find himself a sinner; let him wake up and see how his sin has set him far away from God; let him stand with his stained and frightened soul naked before the eye of God, and then in the conviction of sin he has found what suffering is—sorrow! The other sorrows of his life all fade back out of sight and this is left alone. And can this valley too break forth in wells? It is just here that the well of richest joy is opened at our feet. It is when we realize our guilt and need, and when we learn to cry, 'What must I do to be saved?' that Jesus Christ appears most glorious. It is to the conscious sinner in the dry and parched land of sin that the invitation, 'If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink,' sounds most sweet.

The Bible calls the world a world of sorrow; but the same Bible tells us there is a way of making the vale of misery to laugh with springs and fountains. Remember, it is not just compensation, but transformation, that we are to seek. Not heaven yet. We want a faith, a truth, a grace to help us now, where we are stumbling about, dizzied and fainting with our thirst. And we can have it. One who was man, yet mightier than man, has walked the vale before us. To them who are willing to walk in His footsteps, to keep in His light, the well He opened flows for ever. More than that, it will pass into him and fulfil there Christ's own words: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'

O Lord, of good the Fountain free,
Close by our hard day's journeying,
Be Thou the all-sufficing spring,
And hourly may we drink of Thee.

THE DOORKEEPER'S SONG

Ps. lxxxiv. 10.—'For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

This Psalm has a very interesting piece of history connected with it. Its title, 'a psalm of the sons of Korah,' reminds us of a most pleasing sequel to a terrible tragedy. Korah, along with Dathan and Abiram, raised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. Dathan and Abiram seem to have complained of the leadership of Moses. Korah and his company, on the other hand, had their grievance against Aaron. They objected to the special priesthood of Aaron. 'All the congregation are holy,' they said. So they claimed an equal right to enter the Tabernacle and offer sacrifice. They would not submit to the divinely appointed order, and they could not endure that anyone should occupy a place of more dignity and privilege in God's house than themselves. Moses, therefore, challenged them to put their claims to the proof. Let them fill their censers with incense, let Aaron also fill his, and let both draw near before God. Then it would be seen whom He would accept. So Korah and his company drew near, and there came out a fire from the Lord and consumed them. Such is the story of Korah's presumption and of his awful end.

We might suppose that Korah's children perished with him, especially as we are told of Dathan and Abiram that the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up with their wives, their sons, and their little children. But there is a note added to this effect, 'notwithstanding the children of Korah died not' (Num. xxvi. 11). And as we read on through the history of Israel we find that the sons of Korah held an honourable place in the Temple service.

There appear to have been two choirs in the Temple, one composed of the sons of Asaph, the other of the sons of Korah. Eleven psalms, the 42nd to the 49th, and the 84th to the 88th, are entitled 'a psalm of the sons of Korah.' These probably formed part of the hymn-book of the sons of Korah and were thought worthy of a place among the psalms of Israel.

But further, we are told that the sons of Korah were the doorkeepers of the Temple. It is written, 'Shallum the son of Korah, and his brethren of the house of his father, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle, and their fathers had been over the camp of the Lord, keepers of the entry' (1 Chron. ix. 19 (R.V.). No doubt this fact is referred to in our text, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' It adds greatly to the force and beauty of the words when we think of them as sung by the actual doorkeepers in God's house. We sometimes say, 'I had sooner do this or that—sweep the streets, or beg my bread from door to door,' meaning that it is the last thing in the world we should choose to do. And if our words were put to the proof and we actually had to do it, we should be mightily discontented with our condition. But here is a man who is really doing the thing he speaks of, and having had full experience of that condition of life and the duties that belong to it, he looks the whole world in the face and says he would not change places with the best of them.

What a fine picture this gives us of the sons of Korah and of the spirit in which they went about their work. Plainly they had learnt the lesson of their father's dreadful fate and were completely cleansed from his presumption. They had come to know that 'he that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' So they were content to have a place even at the doors of God's house, and they went about their work with a song of praise upon their lips. 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be always praising Thee.' So they sang. And when any man spoke of the pleasures of sin and the glorious times he was having, they had their answer ready. 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.' Their choice was soon made. 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

I

The Quality of Life

If one were to state in general terms the principle which underlies our text it would be this, that life must be measured by quality as well as by quantity. One day may be better than a thousand, just as a single gold coin is better than a handful of copper. A day of liberty is better than years in a dungeon. A day of health is worth many days of sickness. A life lived among the comforts and blessings of civilization is richer and fuller than a life of ignorance and barbarism. 'Better a year of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.' If we had our choice we should not hesitate a moment. We should say, 'There is no comparison. A day of the one is better than a thousand of the other.'

Take the lives of two men. They may be equal in length, but most unequal in value. Their days may be the same in number, but not the same in preciousness. As David's men said to him, when he would go forth to battle with them against Absalom, 'Thou shalt not go forth. . . . Thou art worth ten thousand of us.' Even so we find—the life of one man priceless, of another worthless, so that one day is better than a thousand, more beautiful, more fruitful, more enduring. It has been finely said:

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.[1]

Or, in the well-known lines of Horatius Bonar:

He liveth long who liveth well!
All other life is short and vain;
He liveth longest who can tell
Of living most for heavenly gain.

He liveth long who liveth well!
All else is being flung away;
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day.

[1] Bailey, *Festus*.

It is in this sense that the Psalmist says, 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand,' —richer, fuller, more profitable, more satisfying. 'The worst of Christ,' says Samuel Rutherford, 'even His chaff, is better than the world's coin.' To be a doorkeeper in God's house, or to lie on the doorstep (as some would render it), is preferable to the softest seat or the most exalted place among the wicked. Satan said, if we may credit Milton, 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.'[1] He is all for liberty, and he makes offer of a life rich and free and happy. He would have men believe that God's service is a bondage, and God's house a place of weariness and gloom. But, in truth, the life apart from God is poor and worthless, lacking the quality of true life. There is no glory in it, no immortal hope. Therefore it is fitly compared to the life of the blind or the state of the dead, for, tried by the highest standard, it is no life at all. It is the life spent in God's service, dull and pitiful as the world may think it, which is alone worth living, and incomparably the best. The Psalmist, then, had a true sense of relative values when he said, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

II

Dignity

Various reasons might be given in support of his estimate. Consider, for one thing, the transcendent dignity of God's service. It is the service of the Most High, it brings us into the presence of Him who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We know how, even by the noblest in the land, it is counted an honour to serve the king. Such service confers a dignity which rank and fortune cannot give. How eagerly do people covet any office which will bring them into the king's presence and into the royal household. They would rather that than have a score of menials at their beck and call. There you see the spirit of the Psalmist in a more ignoble form—better to serve in the king's house than to be served and honoured anywhere else. When Sir Walter Raleigh spread his new cloak in the mud for Queen Elizabeth to walk over, he was really saying, 'Better be trod on by a queen than worn by a courtier.' The service of the king has a kingly dignity about it.

What shall we then say of the service of Him before whom all earthly kings must bend the knee? Here, surely, life rises to its highest dignity. The coronation of our British sovereigns is a scene of great magnificence, but it culminates in a solemn and beautiful act which points to a higher realm. When the crown has been set on the king's head and his lords have done him homage, he in his turn kneels at the altar pledging himself to the service of God. That act seems to say that God's service is higher than the highest earthly dignity, that it is better to be the least in the kingdom of heaven than the greatest among the sons of men. And so it is. The humblest place in God's house takes rank above all earthly dignities. The greatest gifts and talents, the highest powers of intellect and of heart are glorified when they are employed in His service. In any lower service they are misspent and flung away.

Well would it be for us if we always bore this in mind, that God's service is the noblest work we can ever be called upon to do. Christian people are content sometimes to give the dregs of their time to God, and the fag end of their strength, and the loose coppers of their income, under the impression seemingly that they can use their powers and talents to better purpose otherwise, and that the mere ends and sweepings are good enough for God. Surely such service is an insult to our King. We can never be better employed than in His service. The Psalmist felt it was an honour to do the humblest thing for God. To be a doorkeeper was perhaps a lowly office, but then it was in God's house and that made all the difference. A humble Christian woman, a church cleaner in the north of Scotland, remarked with simple piety that she never went about her work without these lines of the Psalm coming to her mind,

> Thy saints take pleasure in her stones,
> Her very dust to them is dear.

There spoke reverence and the true spirit of service. We may not be able to do anything great in itself, or occupy a place of prominence, but if we bear in mind that it is God's service—if we say to ourselves continually, 'I do this

[1] *Paradise Lost*, i. 262.

for God,' then we shall realize that there is transcendent dignity in it, and we shall feel ourselves honoured in the doing of it.

III

Permanence

Consider further that God's service is to be preferred because of its permanence. The Psalmist seems to point at that when he contrasts the 'house of God' with the 'tents of wickedness.' The house has foundations and stands firm from year to year, and from generation to generation. The tent is movable and shifting, here to-day and gone to-morrow. By this we are reminded that the pleasures of sin are but for a season. They that dwell in the tents of wickedness shall one day be left destitute, but the humblest servant of God will always have a roof above his head, a shelter from the storm, a refuge and a dwelling-place for ever.

Lord Macaulay in his famous essay on Clive points out that it was this quality of permanence that made the natives of India prefer humble office under British rule to the most splendid offers of Eastern despots. 'A hostile monarch may promise mountains of gold to our sepoys on condition that they desert the standard of the Company. The Company promises only a moderate pension after long service. But every sepoy knows that the promise of the Company will be kept, he knows that if he lives a hundred years his salt and rice are as secure as the salary of the Governor-General; and he knows that there is not another state in India which would not, in spite of the most solemn vows, leave him to die of hunger in a ditch as soon as he ceased to be useful.' So, might one say, does the devil play the despot to those that serve him, and fling them away when they are useless. It is no unusual thing for his servants to die of hunger in a ditch. After their brief hour of sunshine the grey mists gather and the night comes on. Then it can be seen whose service is the best. As Wolsey said pathetically when ruined and forsaken,

> O Cromwell, Cromwell!
> Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, He would not in mine age
> Have left me naked to mine enemies.[1]

[1] Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII.*, Act III. Scene 2.

No! God makes with His servants a covenant ordered in all things and sure. The Lord will not deceive nor cast off His people. Hear His promise. 'Even to your old age I am He, and even to your hoar hairs will I carry you' (Isaiah xlvi. 4). This was the Psalmist's confidence. 'The Lord God,' he said, 'is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory.' His faith was like David's, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' So he rejoiced to serve God even in the humblest office, even about the doors of His house, for he was assured that 'His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face,' and shall dwell in the glory of His presence for evermore.

IV

Love

Above all, God's service is to be preferred because it is a service of love. 'Better,' says Solomon, 'a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith' (Proverbs xv. 17). Better to dwell in the abode of love than to frequent the haunts of sin, where lust and selfishness and falsehood are. Better a doorkeeper in the Father's house, and humble among brethren, than to be exalted among the wicked amid envy and strife and hollow flattery. Plainly the Psalmist prefers God's house and God's service because his heart is there. He speaks of 'the house of my God.' Mark that word '*my*.' There lies the secret. Other gods may not be worthy of such devotion, but it is no burden to serve *my* God. He is mine, and I am His, wholly and forever. 'To serve God and live to Him is easy to him that doeth it. Truly it is so to him who doeth it for love, but it is hard and wearisome to him who doeth it for hire. It is the same with all virtue and good works, and likewise with order, laws, obedience to precepts and the like. But God rejoiceth more over one man who truly loveth, than over a thousand hirelings.'[1] Slavery, John Wesley said, is the sum of all the villainies, but slavery is utterly transformed if it be the willing bondage of love. That was a beautiful custom in ancient Israel whereby, when the day of emancipation came for a slave, he might

[1] *Theologia Germanica*, xxxviii.

stand at the door of his master's house and make a declaration, saying plainly, 'I love my master, I will not go free.' Then the master would pin his ear for a moment to the door post, and bind him to his service for ever.

The Psalmist would have been ready to make that declaration with all his heart. He had found God to be the best of masters. He was bound to Him by every tie of gratitude and affection, and he had no wish to go free. No doubt he had many memories of benefits received, of times when God had been to him a sun and shield, lighting his darkness and sheltering his soul. By all these things he had come to know Him and love Him and take Him for his own. And in return he gladly gave his all, and welcomed each humble duty as an opportunity to express his love.

Here we reach the inmost secret of the Psalmist's estimate of life, and it explains the devotion of all the saints of God. Their labours and watchings are not a burden to them but a joy—the fruit of a love that hungers to express itself. They reason in this wise: 'God is our God, has given Himself utterly to us in Jesus Christ, has loved us from everlasting, has redeemed us by the blood of the Cross, has washed us from our sins, has made us to be kings and priests and heirs of His heavenly kingdom. What can we render in return to such a God? Can any service be too great? Can any demand upon us compare with our debt to Him? No, for we are not our own but His, bought with a price and bound to His service forever.'

'I cling,' says one of the saintliest writers of our time, 'to the old evangelical doctrine of the Atonement, to the Pauline interpretation of the Cross of Calvary, to the Gospel unfolded in a word like this, The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me: I cling to these things for many reasons, and, not least, because I do not know a more potent incentive to holy living and to untiring service.'[1] Like St Paul he lived and laboured under the constraint of the love of Christ. As the aged seer warned young Gareth of King Arthur and his mystic city,

> Take thou heed of him, for so thou pass
> Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
> A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
> Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
> A man should not be bound by, yet the which
> No man can keep.[1]

Even so does the Heavenly King bind His servants to Him by the spell of His love, so that they count it all joy to win the humblest place in His Kingdom and to serve Him even about the door.

> Only to stand on the threshold,
> Though I see not the Master's face—
> At the gate of His holy palace
> To have my name and my place;
> From my post I shall never wander,
> At my watch I shall never sleep,
> And my heart shall sing for gladness
> At the door I am set to keep.
>
> Only to stand on the threshold!
> Ah! this were heaven to me,
> After the dreary desert,
> After the wintry sea;
> But I hear Him call me higher,
> In accents low and sweet—
> I shall not stand on the threshold,
> But sit at the Master's feet.

Yea, more, when the humble doorkeeper shall hear the voice which bids him, 'Come up hither,' he shall exchange the threshold for the throne. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne.'

J. H. Morrison.

[1] A. Smellie, *Service and Inspiration*, 6.

God our Sun

Ps. lxxxiv. 11.—'The Lord God is a sun.'

1. Astronomy is one of the oldest of the sciences; it has its roots far back in prehistoric times; and not a few very remarkable discoveries must have been made when the race was in its childhood. Especially in the East, where the stars burn and glitter as with the intensity of some great moral purpose, had students outwatched the lonely night in gazing, and linked the stars with the destinies of men. But always, in the very centre of their system, there was poised this earth on which we live.

[1] Tennyson, *Gareth and Lynette*.

This was the focus, this was the pivot of the whole machine; and till the earth was displaced from her usurped centrality, and cast into some outer circle of the system, progress was barred, true knowledge was impossible, and a thousand facts remained inexplicable.

In this respect the progress of our life is not unlike the progress of astronomy. We all begin in one way or another by making this earth on which we dwell the centre. Our hopes, our dreams, our joys, and our ambitions cluster and circle round this present world. The strange thing is that while *this* remains the centre, for us as for the astronomer much is dark. A thousand problems baffle our inquiry and a thousand questions are answered by a cry. What is the meaning of suffering or pain? Why are so many faces drawn in agony? Why are those who are too gentle to harm a living creature bowed down for years in intolerable anguish? These questions rise up to meet us and are unanswerable, so long as this life, this earth, this present world remains the centre of the moral system. But the day comes—and it comes to every man—when he has his chance of being a Copernicus. He has his choice of making the great refusal or of making the grandest of all grand discoveries, for the greatest discovery a man can make is that God is the centre of the system. It is to realize that in the centre does not stand the world, but the love and the wisdom and the will of the Almighty. And when once, through whatever pain and discipline, a man has discovered that fact about his universe he is no longer crying in the night. He sees a meaning now where there was none before. He believes in the melody of minor chords. Problems are eased, dark facts can now be faced; there is light in the gloom and hope of a tearless morn—all this in some measure every man has known who has truly striven to make God the centre.

2. Another idea is suggested by the sun. Many of us have been oppressed by the thought of a distant God; we sometimes have thought of Him as far away, as having His throne in the remote heaven of heavens. But if the sun can have its being ninety million miles away, and yet can fall with such power as to heat a continent, and with such exquisite nicety as to make the rosebud redden, why should it seem a thing incredible to us that the Creator who fashioned that glorious lamp should dwell apart immeasurably far, yet touch and turn and bless and save humanity? He takes up the isles as a very little thing—the nations before Him are as nothing. Yet He knows the way that I take; He understands my thought. Powerful, yet very far away; thoughtful and tender, though hidden in the distance.

¶ God is the God of *all*, and yet He is *my* God. At the same moment He pervades heaven and earth, takes charge of the sustenance, progress, and growing happiness of the unbounded creation, and He is present with me, as intent upon my character, actions, wants, trials, joys, and hopes, as if I were the sole object of His love.[1]

3. God is a sun: that is infinity of blessing. No man can conceive the measure of the light and heat of the sun. They are beyond conception great. Light and heat have been continually streaming forth throughout many ages, yet all that has come forth of it is far less than that which still remains. For all practical purposes the light and heat of the sun are infinite; and certainly in God all blessedness is absolutely infinite. There is no measuring it. We are lost. We can only say, 'Oh, the depths of the love and goodness of God!'

I cannot go
Where Universal Love smiles not around,
Sustaining all yon orbs and all their suns;
From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still,
In infinite progression.[2]

¶ To a friend who was experiencing a heavy sorrow, Dr Martineau wrote, 'Often the love of God is hid—passes behind the cloud and leaves us with a cold shudder of alarm, as if it were not there. But the Divine realities do not depend on our apprehension of them; the eclipse of our vision makes no difference to their shining, except to us. The Infinite Love abides behind, and waits till we return to it, and the intercepting veil falls away. At times, I think, when the mists of fear and distrust gather round the heart, it is even better to forget Him till He finds us again, and say: "I will possess my soul in patience," than to accuse either Him or oneself of deserting a

[1] W. E. Channing. [2] James Thomson.

relation which is suspended, it may be, only to be more closely bound.' [1]

4. The heat and light of the sun come to this world through the surrounding atmosphere. Without the envelope of closely clinging air that engirdles this globe like some diaphanous garment, the heat of the sun and all the light of it would fall ineffectually on the earth. When we climb a mountain we get nearer the sun; would one not naturally think that it ought to get hotter there? As a matter of fact it gets colder as we rise till we reach the peaks that are robed with perpetual snow. The reason is that we are piercing through that air which enfolds this little earth of ours. It is the atmosphere that mediates the sun, that catches and stores and distributes the heat. Were there no air, but only empty space, then the greenest valley would be like Mont Blanc, and the tropics would be icebound in a perpetual winter, though the sun in itself were as fiery-hot as ever.

May we not make use of this mystery of Nature to illuminate a kindred mystery of grace? It is one of the ways of God to grant His blessings through an intermediary. You say that the sun is the source of heat and light; why then should anything be intruded between earth and sun? One can only answer, So the Creator works—without that mediating element all is lost. You say that God is the source of love and blessing; why should anything intervene betwixt God and man? One can only answer that it is the way of heaven to grant its richest blessing through a mediator. How often men and women have said, 'I do not feel any need of Christ or Calvary. I believe in God, I reverence and worship God; but the sacrifice and the atonement just confuse me. They appear to be outside of me altogether; I cannot make them real to my heart.' But through every sphere of God's activity runs the great principle of mediation. The presence of Christ is like the air, making available for our need the love of God. Remove the atmosphere, and the sun will still shine in heaven. Take away Jesus, and God will still be love. Banish the air, and the sun will not lose its heat. But with the air gone, the glory of the sun will never so fall as to bless our little world, and with Jesus banished, the mercy and love of God may stream on other realms but not on ours. Christ is the mediator of the better covenant. He stands—the vital breath—'twixt God and us. Through Him the sunshine of heaven's love can reach us, and in the rays of that sunshine we are blessed.

[1] *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, i. 450.

5. When the sun is invisible we still see its reflected light; for we all know that the light which gilds the moon, and which gives such a lustre of brilliance to the planets, is not the light of their own burning hearts, but the light of the sun which to our eyes has set. Go out some March evening and look at the western sky, where Venus is glowing in her unequalled splendour—then remember that but for the sunshine which is gone from us, there would be no such jewel in the ear of night. Now in the spiritual world are there not also times when the sun seems to have set? There is such evil in the State and such quarrelling in the Church, that men are tempted to cry, There is no God. In such hours, urgent and paramount becomes the duty of personal religion. In such hours, Christian character is called for with an appeal that no other time can match. For the Lord God is a sun, and when He seems to sink out of the national or ecclesiastical horizon, then lives that still glow with His light amid the dark are the unanswerable argument for Him.

¶ What was said with truth of Bishop Fraser of Manchester was, in a less direct and practical way, true of Stanley: 'He was daily bringing down light from heaven into the life of other people.' No one could long come in contact with Stanley without feeling that he was walking in the light, and without being affected by its radiation. It was this background that gave dignity to his simplicity of character, that preserved the spiritual elements of his nature from materialism, that gilded his social intercourse with a tenderness, an unobtrusiveness, a sincerity, an evenness of temper, and a consideration for others, that permeated, purified, and strengthened the society in which he moved.[1]

Grace and Glory

Ps. lxxxiv. 11.—'The Lord will give grace and glory.'

GRACE is a word more characteristic of the New Testament than of the Old. It is not seen in its full beauty apart from Jesus Christ, yet it is

[1] R. E. Prothero, *Life of Dean Stanley*, ii. 23.

not emptied of all its significance when it falls from the lips of the Psalmist. The previous sentence amply proves this. 'The Lord God is a sun,' and the outstanding feature of the sun is its spontaneous and ungrudging generosity.

But what strikes us most of all is the collocation of the two words 'grace' and 'glory.' Grace as the sunshine and glory as the rainbow which the grace weaves on the clouds of life. And this union is not an accident. Like light and heat, like root and stalk, like spring and stream, they are joined together in Bible teaching, in Church history, and in Christian experience. In Church history every fresh discovery of grace has resulted in a fresh outburst of glory. The infant Church of the New Testament marched forward with a royal impressiveness that was well-nigh irresistible, but its glory was largely due to the discovery of grace. It was grace that made Paul, and it was Paul that made early Christendom. Then much that is choicest in our modern life is due to the Protestant Reformation, and that was due to Martin Luther's vision of free and full forgiveness. We hear much about love in these days, but it is often love minus that something which constitutes its grace. We hear a great deal about religion, but it is as psychology rather than as revelation. It is the approach of man to God rather than that of God to man. There is more humanitarianism than ever, but with it the tendency to limit religion to a relationship between man and man, and to exclude from it the greatness and the wonder that comes from communion with the Divine. We can only regain the glory as we regain the grace. If we understood grace better we would understand God better. A new vision of grace would add a fresh splendour to every conception we form of His character.

1. Most Christian men think of God in a fourfold way. They think of Him as the indwelling life of the world, as perfect holiness, as the God of the Incarnation and as the God of Calvary and the Cross. Grace gives significance and force and wonder to each of these conceptions. Without grace immanence would mean fatalism, holiness would become overwhelming in its austerity; the Incarnation would lose its dignity, and the Cross would be robbed of its triumph and joy.

(1) Grace saves immanence from fatalism; it makes the indwelling God a friend and a helper, and not a despot.

Consider how utterly dependent we are on God's help even in our simplest efforts and most insignificant acts. The utterance of a simple word is a matter of grace. Milton and Schiller, Kepler and Gœthe, have willingly acknowledged that all their best thoughts came like birds from the open windows of God.

> It is not I who have written,
> It is not I who have sung,
> I'm the chord that Another has smitten
> The chime that Another has rung.
> I give but the things I am given,
> I share but the things that I see,
> I draw, but my pencil is driven
> By a force that is master of me.

Prayer is of grace, so is breathing; worship is of grace, so is business. There is no activity of the human soul but is charged with the graciousness of the indwelling God. His nearness is wonderful, but it is more wonderful still that His nearness does not crush and overpower us.

> God, whose pleasure brought
> Man into being, stands away,
> As if it were a hand-breadth off, to give
> Room for the newly-made to live
> And look at Him from a place apart,
> And use His gifts of brain and heart.

(2) Grace saves the holiness of God from austerity and invests it with healing and hope. It is possible for the Divine holiness to be so presented as to produce paralysis and despair. Moses preached holiness, but it was holiness that brought no healing. Carlyle preached it to the last generation, making God an alien Power and a holy Taskmaster, holding in His hand the dread whip of an inexorable retribution. But that is holiness minus grace; holiness negative and not positive; holiness restraining and not healing and restoring. Holiness at its noblest and best is God thinking, feeling, willing, suffering, sacrificing, outleaping every expectation, surprising the guilty with forgiveness and the fallen with hope.

(3) Grace saves the Incarnation from being commonplace and preserves its dignity and

wonder. There is no doctrine more popular to-day than the Incarnation and humanity of Christ. But it has been almost monopolized for the purpose of transfiguring ordinary life and inspiring social reform. We say rightly that our Lord by becoming man revealed the worth of life and the sacredness of time. He sanctified the home and the cradle, He dignified labour and the workshop, He hallowed friendship, He honoured marriage. All this is true, and it has already ushered in a fairer day. But that is only an aspect of the truth. That is not the whole of the Incarnation as St Paul and the writers of the New Testament understood it. They thought of it as a stupendous condescension on the part of God. 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich.' There is here something more than the enrichment of man. There is God bending from the heights of His majesty to touch and grasp our insignificance and poverty.

¶ History makes mention of a king who sat on a throne of rude and royal state, ruling over millions of serfs in a vast territory. Eagerly desiring to uplift his people he laid aside his crown and his robes, stepped down from his throne and entered other lands as an unprivileged stranger. He came to London, where he worked on the Thames as a ship-carpenter, supporting himself on his wages; and after a lengthened period of service he returned to Russia laden with stores of experience, sympathy, wisdom, and skill. Peter the Great did much by his labours to bring his people out of the darkness of night to the dawn.

(4) Grace relieves the gloom and the tragedy of the Cross. A Roman gibbet is in itself ghastly and sordid, and by no means an object to cast a spell over the love and the devotion of men, but it is not the agony, it is the willingness and the joy of the sacrifice. The New Testament word for grace literally means gladness. In three matchless parables our Lord has made this clear. He has shown us grace reclaiming the lost sheep, recovering the lost coin and restoring the lost son. There is patience implied, it is true, and sacrifice, but it is the joy of the enterprise that engrosses His attention. There is blessedness in His redemption, there is joy in His sacrifice. Our Lord's own word for it was glorification. Because of the joy set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame.

> Gladness be with thee, helper of the world,
> For this is the authentic sign and seal
> Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
> And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts,
> Into a rage to suffer for mankind
> And recommence at sorrow.

2. What is the glory that follows from the grace?

(1) Grace clothes the Church with distinction. Our Puritan fathers had a beautiful name for the services of the sanctuary. They called them the means of grace—not means of instruction, although they are that. The vital factor is the grace of God. That is what humanity everywhere wants. It is God and His grace that can ease its restlessness and satisfy its cry. Eloquence and culture, music and oratory it can obtain in other quarters, but in this the Church of Christ is a specialist. Its supreme mission is to dispense the grace of God to a needy world.

(2) Grace adds dignity and charm to the life of the individual Christian. To the Apostle Paul the Christian was a new creature, a distinct species, very different from the man of the world. Further, this type has persisted in every age, in every land, in every Church. We see it in Francis of Assisi, in Madame Guyon, in Keble, in John Woolman, in Whittier. The children of grace are known everywhere. There can be no roses without fragrance, and no Divine grace without gracious saints.

(3) Grace adds elevation and effectiveness to social reform. Never were nobler attempts made to improve the conditions of life than are made to-day, and never was there more keenly felt the need for some mighty leverage to lift the whole of our social organizations on to a higher level. It is easy to legislate for the strong, but the crux of the problem is the weak. If the grace of God is the greatest force in the world, then as sure as daylight follows the sun there will one day emerge a social system that will outleap the reformer's fondest dream. Not based on selfishness and dominated by money, not regulated by justice bare and cold and grudging, but instinct from inner centre to outer rim with goodwill and helpfulness, its nexus grace, its relationship brotherhood and not force.

The Blessedness of Trust

Ps. lxxxiv. 12.—'O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.'

'O Lord of hosts,' cries the Psalmist in his culminating note, 'blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.' And when we look back on the earlier verses, we agree that no other conclusion is admissible. They furnish us with decisive proofs of the blessedness of trust. It has different faces, and each of them is friendly and kind. It has a multitude of hands, and without exception they are filled with good and perfect gifts.

1. Blessed is trust. He who knows it dwells in God's home.

George Gissing has sketched for us, under a thin veil of disguise, the outlines of his autobiography. Till near the close, his history was marked by great privations. He was exceedingly poor. He feared that he must pass away as one of the defeated. What was worst of all, he was without a home of his own—a mere fugitive from one alien lodging to another. But at the last a happy thing befell him. He was bequeathed a life-annuity of three hundred pounds. Immediately he quitted London, and took a cottage in Devonshire. His cup of contentment overflowed. 'Every stick and stone of my house,' he said, 'is dear to me as my heart's blood; I find myself laying an affectionate hand on the door-post, giving a pat, as I go by, to the garden gate. Every tree and shrub in the garden is my beloved friend; I touch them, when need is, very tenderly, as though carelessness might pain, or roughness injure them. If I pull up a weed in the walk, I look at it with a certain sadness before throwing it away; it belongs to my home.'[1]

This is home on the earthly scale—a world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in. But the soul's home, in God's temple and in God Himself, is better. 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house!' our singer says. When we abide with God His protection garrisons us. His presence hallows us; thought, speech, activity are all under His supervision now. His provision feeds us; both 'heart and flesh,' the inner self and its instrument the body, lack for nothing that is necessary and good; in David Brainerd's phrase, we 'repair to a full Fountain.' And when we abide with God His fellowship rejoices us.

2. Blessed is trust. He who practises it travels God's highway.

It is among the paradoxes of the believing life that the disciple who is ineffably and pre-eminently at home is also perpetually on the march. Two satisfactions are his—that of residing in God's house, and this of turning feet and face and purpose towards God and His house. Happy, the Psalm declares, are the men in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

We are inmates of the richest dwelling; but from sunrise to sunset, and from the first of the year to the last of the year, our wants continue. So keenly we may realize them that we seem at times to plod through an arid Valley of Baca. Ours are circumstances of special difficulty. Ours are aspirations which, so soon as they are granted, pass into fresh aspirations incredibly bigger and more remote. Ours is a vision of Christ and His beauty which makes our own imperfections increasingly and humblingly manifest. Daily quickenings and comforts must be ours, and we are never able to dispense with supernatural grace. Our inheritance in God is incapable of expansion; His gift of Himself was perfect from the outset, infinite and eternal and unchangeable; but our appropriation of it and of Him may be far more adequate. Thus, week by week, we journey on.

¶ In his Life of Furius Camillus, Plutarch writes, prettily enough, about those Gauls who did such mischief to the Roman Republic, that they might have stayed in their own country if they had not tasted of the wine which was brought out of Italy to them: 'Which drink they found so good, and were so delighted with it, that suddenly they armed themselves; and, taking their wives and children with them, they went directly towards the Alps, to go seek out the country that brought forth such fruit, judging all other countries in respect of that to be but wild and barren.' Stevenson has a similar enticing fancy about the Goths and Vandals who, in a later age, overturned the Roman Empire. 'They were drawn by the magnetic influence of the South and West. The name of the Eternal City rang

[1] *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft.*

in their ears. They were not colonists, but pilgrims.'

3. Blessed is trust. He who lives in it pleads and prevails at God's throne.

Our God, the Psalm affirms, wears a double name. He is 'Lord of Hosts.' That is His name of majesty. And He is 'God of Jacob.' That is His name of mercy. He marshals the troops of the angels and the armies of the stars; and He surrenders to a stubborn and erring man, whom first He has had to break and humiliate, and then has taught to cling helplessly about His feet, refusing to let Him go. Our vast necessity will not stagger, our utter frailty will not estrange, Him whose immense resources are conjoined with compassions as immense.

Moreover, we have an Ally at His court. 'Look,' the Psalmist urges, 'look upon the face of thine anointed.' He might himself be the most unpretending of Hebrew citizens or peasants—this singer whose name we do not know; but his welfare was bound up with the welfare of his king, who was Jehovah's own representative, David or Hezekiah or Josiah; and therefore, whatever the winds that blew on him or the enemies who assailed him, he was secure. And our King is not only God's Anointed but God's Son, in whose character and sacrifice and intercession God has a measureless delight. When He looks on our Saviour Christ, and when He listens to Him, it is well with us.

4. Blessed is trust. He who breathes its air is in covenant with God Himself.

Things may be precious, but Persons are even more significant and more precious. God's house, God's highway, and God's royal seat are marvellously good; but God Himself is best. And straight to Him the Psalmist leads us, before he ends his song.

What is God? He is 'Sun and Shield,' Light when we are in darkness, Bulwark when we are threatened by adversaries. What does He bestow? He 'will give grace and glory,' redemption in its initiation and redemption in its coronation, morning and noonday, first-fruits and harvest-home. It is a pregnant language, and the New Testament is its commentary. God is Author of grace; for He sends Christ to provide it through blood and death, and the Holy Spirit to convey it in actual possession to our separate souls. He is Architect of glory; fitting heaven for us through Christ, and through the Holy Spirit fitting us for heaven. All to Him we owe; yet we have our part—to receive His supply, to leave ourselves in His keeping, and to go rejoicing on our way; a simple part, but an essential one.

¶ Sir Henry Newbolt translates a little rondel from the French of an old Duke of Brabant. It is the vow of the knight who has made irrevocable surrender of himself to his lady. But let us print its pronoun with a capital, because we think not of a human beloved but of the Beloved who is Divine.

Long ago to Thee I gave
Body, soul, and all I have—
Nothing in the world I keep.

All that in return I crave
Is that Thou accept the slave
Long ago to Thee I gave.

VOICES OF THE RESTORED LIFE

THE EIGHTY-FIFTH PSALM

THERE are few Psalms in the Psalter which are all pure gold like the Eighty-fifth. Think of its notes—'Pardon, salvation, revival—God's great presence dwelling in the land, victory marching before him, and peace following in his footsteps,' a *gloria in excelsis*. Notwithstanding the age from which it must have sprung, when legalism had come to a second birth, there is nothing of that in the Psalm; and this goes to show that even under the arid wastes of official Judaism, there were wells of living water, at which the Pious and the Quiet in the land drank and lived.

The artistic qualities of the Psalm are no less

wonderful. We stand in the Temple courts to hear a choir singing and celebrating God's gracious dealings in the past—

Lord, once thou didst favour thy land—
Restoring the fortunes of Jacob,
Pardoning thy people's guilt,
Forgiving all their sin,
Recalling all thy wrath,
Averting thy hot displeasure.

Then, a second choir softly takes up the music—

Deliver us *again*, O God, our Saviour
. . . . .
Wilt thou not *again* revive us
That thy people may rejoice in thee,
Let us enjoy thy kindness, O Lord,
And grant us thy saving aid.

The fugue is now heard in a solo voice—some prophet of good tidings who is persuaded that while they are yet speaking God has already heard their plaintive prayer.

Let me listen to God speaking.
Speaking, surely, words of peace
To his people, to devout men
Whose hearts turn to himself.
Soon shall his worshippers see his aid
Till his great presence dwells within our land.

Then the choir breaks in to confirm the gospel of this solitary singer, and we listen to their song.

Kindness and Faithfulness unite,
Victory and Peace embrace,
Faithfulness rising from the earth,
And kindness looking down from heaven.

Perhaps the words of the chorus hold a reminiscence in music of Jacob's vision at Bethel of the ascending and descending angels; for it is God who gives all—the expectation, the prayer and its answer. Righteousness, peace, mercy, and glory are the angels ascending and descending on the Lord's Christ; and it is hard to believe that He had not both vision and Psalm in memory in His promise to Nathanael (John i. 51).

Then the Psalm concludes in the massed music of every voice and instrument—the great Amen of the Church's struggle—

Victory marching before God
And peace following in his footsteps.

The Psalm has more than an antiquarian or historical interpretation, and we come now to apply the religious ideas of it to our own life of devotion and the needs of the present day. Both uses are in the Psalm; it is personal, and it is national, 'the prayer of a patriot'; for as such, Goodwin, the Puritan, in 1659 took one of its verses as the text of his sermon at the opening of Parliament in that year. If we take the key-note of the songs as our Guide, we shall come to the heart of the Psalm.

1. *Recollection.*—'Lord, *once* thou didst favour thy land.' The backward look to happier times is one of the most profitable and illuminating uses of history. Though we are reminded by the poet that 'a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things,' this is only partly true, and is not true at all, if we use large maps of human life and destiny. For history, personal or national, may be one of the finest of inspirations, and a moral tonic; behold what God hath wrought! The Bible continually recalls men to past mercies: 'We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what things thou didst in their day'; Lord, *once* Thou didst favour thy land. And, as a rallying cry to worthiness, Jeremiah the prophet, speaking for God, challenged Israel with the memory of her better days.

I remember the troth of thy youth
Thy love as a bride
Thy following me through the desert
The land unsown.

Bunyan, voicing the regretful longing look to a happier time, makes the man in the iron cage say, 'I am what I was not once.' And indeed, there is no voice which goes so direct to the heart as this; to remind a man of his fairer, purer past when once he could sing with the best 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear.' *Once!* In the record of conversions no page is more inspiring than that which tells of men who are touched with the splendid spur that reminds them of all they

once had been. *Noblesse oblige* may become the greatest of evangelical appeals; in the far country the memory of sonship recalls a man to his better self, to arise and go to his father. This reminiscence of worthiness ought to be used not as the upbraiding voice of conscience, but as the call of God's image in the heart—'Strengthen the things that are left to you.' 'Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.' Often when the fires of life are burning low, even in our ashes live our wonted fires; the recollection of what once had been becomes the persuasion of the redeeming gospel of Christ. *Return* is one of the strongest motives in the religious appeal, for it brings the thought that God never does things just once; He will be what He will be, the God of recurring opportunities, who is waiting to be gracious in successive tides of His spirit, restoring, forgiving, and accepting.

And I shall see all clearer, and love better,
And beauteous shapes will come to me again,
And unknown secrets will be trusted me
I shall be priest and lover as of old.

And so the Psalmist, with an intimate knowledge of persuasions that touch the feelings and affect the heart—a better psychologist than he knew—reminds his people of 'the summer-scented days of long ago'; inviting them, but not in rebuke, to go back over the memories and mercies of the past, and find there reasons, and reasons of good hope. Recollection is one of the steps in the new life.

2. *Revival.*—'Wilt thou not, again, revive us.' From the very beginning this has been the characteristic note of religion; indeed, it is one of the evidences for the truth of Christianity that it has in it the power of recovery, can burst the shell of custom and routine, and renew the rapture and the life of its first days. There is no better tonic for the withering pessimism of Christians to-day than to take a turn up and down in the past history of the Church in the ebb and flow of its life. Sometimes it has seemed as if the faith were to perish utterly, but again the revival came. The battle often lost is gained at the last. For a Church cannot die that has strength to pray 'Wilt thou not again revive us?' In a deeper sense than we know the Church lives by revivals, and we need not tie down the word to any particular form, ancient or modern, ethical, emotional, or doctrinal. The idea is greater than all our forms, and may be described in all its length and breadth as the heart recapturing its first rapture. 'Wilt thou not again revive us?' The Psalmist sees a world-wide revival sweeping in from all the deep places of the Spirit, touching life on every side. So in the individual, in the quiet moments when the soul returns on itself, there springs this stubborn hope which no falls can quench, that even in our unworthiest and darkest hour a hand will stretch out of the Infinite to lay hold on ours; the truth is flashed out at one blow, and God remakes the soul again. 'Here beginneth the new life.'

True, I am worn;
But who clothes summer? who is life itself?
God that created all things, can renew.

Every preacher knows the inspiring studies on the Revivals of Life that are found in the early poems of Browning, *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*. Than these there is no better companion to the Eighty-fifth Psalm in its search for a new life springing out of the ruins of the old. 'Again' is the key-note of both Psalmist and poet, the stubborn obstinate feeling which against hope believes in hope that a man may be born when he is old, in the midst of the years. Dr A. B. Davidson states the problem, 'We dash ourselves against the iron cage that holds us, torturing ourselves over an irrevocable unworthiness, to have the joy and the unclouded hopefulness, the fresh and unstained powers of the child, to be born again when one is old. Can it be? It both can, and cannot, be. With men it cannot be. With God it can be. Men remember, God forgets; only God remembers good, men forget it.' In the night of our despair of ever being back again, we turn to Him who died to make the gospel—'With men,' Jesus said, 'it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' That is, we hear the temple-choir singing 'Wilt thou not *again* revive us?'

It is scarcely necessary (though in these overclouded years it is in our mind night and day) to turn to the interpretation of the Psalm which is uppermost in the writer's mind—the national revival of religion. But in passing let it hearten us that the Psalmist is striking the

note of such a renewal after the shock of the Exile; setting to music the eager prophetic voices of the later Isaiah for the beautiful garments of a renewed national life. Enough that he heard it once, we shall hear it one day. Whatever form it may take, let our ears be open to the call, for faith in revival is surely receiving God with an open heart when and where and how He comes, taking Him as our own in every way He can be taken. The prophet of revival speaks to us also upon whom the ends of the world have come, and the singers set his words to a music that confirms our wavering hope.

> Our hearts, if God we seek to know,
> Shall know Him and rejoice.

3. *The Nearness of God.*—This is proclaimed by the solo voice of the Psalm which translates into words the inarticulate longings of many—Let me listen to God speaking to those whose hearts turn to Himself. The singer is the priest offering up on the altar of praise the cry of a thousand hearts. And if we bear in mind the rendering of the Septuagint and Vulgate versions, followed by the *Imitation*, where God is represented as 'speaking *in* me,' a chord is struck dear to the heart of the mystic. Life is appealing to life:

> His that gentle voice we hear,
> Soft as the breath of even.

In such moments God and man meet together with no veils between; all barriers are down, 'When Thou saidst Seek ye my face, my heart saith unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek—'Tis my heart calling, Thy face do I seek.' But God speaks first, the initiative is always with Him—the Divine premovement—to which we can only answer, 'Take me for I come to Thee.' Though all illustrations of the great mystery—the intercommunion of God and the soul—are too dim and too poor to body forth what neither tongue nor pen can show, perhaps the modern analogue of listening-in may serve to point the resemblance; the attention of the open ear, the stillness of the eager heart are among the least unfit of metaphors. Sometimes, when the noise of the world and the rebukes of conscience alike are stilled, God comes calling like the knocking at the door, and we are within touch of the old spiritual joy and the ineffable self-surrender of the first days. God is drawing near; the footfall of His presence and the gleam of His Spirit are preparing the soul for its great hour; not far from any one of us and nearer than we think. The heart turns to Himself; we speak to Him because He hears, and along the highways of the spirit the soul finds God, and is found.

4. *The Testimony of Experience.*—The gospel of the solitary singer is confirmed by the great cloud of witnesses; the experience of God is repeated and confirmed in the voice of the Church, a verification which makes us sure we are on the right road. The full choir adds its great Amen—'We have felt His Kindness, His Faithfulness, His Victory and His Peace. I believed, therefore have I spoken; I bow the knee and pray that, with all the saints, we may comprehend and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.' So, building on experience another Psalmist writes, 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. Here is a poor man whose cry the Lord heard and helped him out of all his troubles; I was brought low and He helped me.' We can trust the saints when they testify of God. This argument from experience is put by Tennyson in the well-known lines—

> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answered, 'I have felt.'

This is the part of the full choir in the Psalm, and we may compare its thought with that of Emerson in *Each and All*, for the strengthening power of witness-bearing.

> The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
> Deems not that great Napoleon
> Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
> Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
> Nor knowest thou what argument
> Thy life to thy neighbour's creed has lent.
> All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone.

There are many arguments for public worship —the Creator's praise, thanksgiving for the mercies of the common day, and the propagation of the truth. But evidence is not wanting that the mass-emotion and influence of a great multitude, and the confession of their Belief, have been mighty in their working for the confirmation of the weak, the inspiring of the strong, and the winning of the stranger to the Call of God. There is reason for believing that the saving power of this appeal was well known to the Early Church. At a time when Faith had to struggle against a world of enemies, believers gathered together 'to speak often to one another' of the things that were dear to them. In their hymns and anthems of faith they who were hunted and persecuted sang of coming days when all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues would gather round 'Our Jesus'; so hearts were brave again and arms were strong. And for the influence of this experience on others, we may well believe that not only in Philippi but all over the Empire prisoners of hope 'were listening to them,' and many bonds were broken. Paul speaks to his Corinthians of these meetings for testimony and prophesying, that is, heart-to-heart talk, 'If some one who is an unbeliever or outsider comes in, he is exposed by all, brought to book by all; the secrets of his heart are brought to light, and so, falling on his face he will worship God declaring, God is really among you' (1 Cor. xiv. 24). The practice is observed and valued in certain churches, and still continues among the sects of what we call unorganized Christianity. Superior people, if there can be any such among Christians, sniff at the practice, but the Church has often been at fault in refusing to learn from the outsider or even the heretic. It would be a good thing for many of our Churches to break up the deadly routine of use and wont and give this practice a trial. It might afford bores and cranks their chance, but, as we are told to satiety, life is meant to be adventurous, life means taking risks, and the risk is well worth running, to hear the testimony of men and women who have tried for themselves what God can do.

But, as we are studying a psalm, let us remember that the gospel may be sung as well as spoken. Dr R. W. Dale used to insist on the ministry of the choir that sings the Word of God to the people, as the minister preaches it. And here in the Psalm the prophetic voice of one is caught up, reinforced and carried to all, who hear, by the wings of testimony and praise, the great Amen of the multitude.

Come we that love the Lord
And let our joys be known.

5. *The End.*—'Victory marching before God, and Peace following in His footsteps.' Every revival of religion has been accompanied with the thought of The End, with an *Ode of Joy* or a wail of despair. The expectation of The End was inwrought into the preaching of the Early Church, while in Reformation thought it had the same high place. And, true to the genius of religion, this Psalm with its entirely spiritual ideas begins with the cry for Revival, and concludes with the End of the Lord, the ultimate goal of history.

There is an End to which all human history is moving, and *God* brings it in, not primarily through men's obedience, nor for their sake, but through His own act, and for His own name's sake. Our Lord prays, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'; this is the end to which He looked. It has come, it is ever coming, and it is to come; we are saved, we are being saved, we shall be saved.

In the Psalms there is none of the dreary pessimism which in our moods we permit to ourselves. Isaiah (and he seems to be in the air throughout this Psalm) looks forward to the day when the perfect Servant shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, or, as Moffatt, almost in the words of this Psalm, translates the thought—'Therefore he shall see victory, he shall succeed triumphantly.' The vision is always on the skyline, and in its light the worker travels, 'on to the bound of the waste, on to the city of God.' It is as true as God's own word is true, and, in the faith that human history has its goal in God's intention, we do not faint. It is unthinkable that there can ever be an End in which the Spirit of God shall not have the last word to say. It is told us by those who know that the last hours of Dr Alexander Whyte were cheered with this thought of the End of the Lord; that he dwelt much on the hymn which by his desire was sung at his funeral,

Then the End, Thy Church completed,
All thy chosen gathered in.

Such are the thoughts of this great Psalm; and as we read we wonder how this pure lyric of spiritual religion grew up in the soil of that hard time, when so much else, less lovely, held the thoughts of many. Here there is nothing of the dross of certain aspects of apocalyptic, but only the refiner's silver, spirituality and universality; that is always the surprise of the great Psalms in the Psalter. They were for the use of the Community, but that they were intended for the individual as well is no less clear. Dr Welch has told us that in Babylonia and Egypt a similar practice prevailed; 'Hymns have been discovered with blank headings; *I, M.N.* or, as we should say,—I, *so and so*, profess and confess,—then follows the hymn.' That is to say, the man who had occasion to use the Psalm filled in his own name in each case. This is also the Christian Use of the Psalms. We take these old lyrics tear-stained with the sorrows of many generations, thumbed and worn by the touch of those who used them in the heights and depths of life, and we fill in our own name; and thus we become fellow-worshippers and believers; with them in their faith and penitence we are saying, I, and Thou, to God. Nothing else matters. When this peak is gained we are with the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains, seeing on the horizon the gleaming towers and spires of Immanuel's Land.

W. M. Grant.

The Breath of Spring

Ps. lxxxv. 6.—'Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?'

1. This is a text for the spring-time, when we feel the thrill of new life and hope in our hearts. 'Wilt thou not revive us again?' Thou art reviving everything. The whole world is waking out of its sleep. Every clod of earth is stirring at the touch of life, and every buried seed and every little bud in field and hedgerow is breaking and bursting forth with new life. The prayer leaps to our lips as we feel it all about us—this rising, rushing tide of life; and we say, 'Let the breath of spring breathe on me; let the stream of life come in upon me.'

'Where are the snowdrops?' said the sun;
'Dead,' said the frost,
'Buried and lost,
Every one!'

'A foolish answer,' said the sun;
'They did not die,
Asleep they lie,
Every one!'

'And I will wake them, I the sun,
Into the light,
All clad in white,
Every one!'

How hard it must be to be shut out from it all, and to feel that this is not for us! Is it not sad to be sick in the spring-time, with life low and faint, when the colour goes from the cheek, and the spring and strength from the limbs, and we are spent and feeble amid all this abundant life? And hard it is to feel in the spring-time that life has lost its freshness and buoyancy and hope. To be worried and wearied, depressed and discouraged, listless and useless and sad, and to feel nothing within us that answers to the fresh, radiant, abundant life around us—what can we do but cry to God, who sends the spring-time over His rejoicing world: 'Wilt thou not revive us again?'

When we take the text along with the spring-time and try to see what such reviving means we find that it is not the beginning of life, but the increase of life. The coming of spring is the coming of life in full flood-tide. It throws up its spray in myriads of flowers. It rolls up its waves in mighty forests, and spreads them out over broad green fields. No thoughtful man can watch it without wonder—this immense flood of life!

¶ Last year I was in Surrey at the end of April, for a single day, and walked through the woods of Albury. There had been abundance of rain the night before, but the sunlight of the day was bright, and every leaf, tree, and flower was glittering with waterdrops. In the warm mist everything seemed to grow with more swiftness, and the old phrase, that if one stayed in the silence and listened, one could hear the grass growing, seemed literally true. Life ran to the end of every spray, and rushed into a million leaves and flowers; and I thought that no human passion could be more intense

than that with which the young leaves of the beech burst from their long sheath; no light in human eyes more suggestive of fullness of life within the heart than the gold and green glory of light than rained upon me through the unnumbered foliage of the limes. A step further, and the sky seemed to have fallen on the earth, for where the wood opened a little, a great slope as far as the eye could reach up and down was clothed with a myriad-flowered mist of bluebells; it seemed as if all the life of the earth had given itself to make them, so multitudinous were they; and as to the primroses, a bank of which I came to by-and-by, so rich was the life in them that I counted fifty flowers springing from a single root, and there were thousands of plants in that sunny place. It was the same in everything, everywhere incalculable, inexhaustible, rushing life, life that never rested, never wearied.[1]

2. Can we not come into sympathy with this waking, quickening world, and rejoice in this message? There is reviving for the life that is low and feeble and declining.

We feel it in these bodies of ours, in sickness and in health. We know how life has its reverses and its revivings. There comes weakness, weariness, the loss of living power; and we pass into the winter of our discontent. But as long as life is there, there is the hope of reviving. And when the tide turns and life begins to flow in full force, when the pulse makes a stronger beat, there is no happier experience—we are getting back what we had lost.

So it is in our religious experience. We are not dead, but we are not in vigorous health. We are not in full possession, full enjoyment of life as Christians ought to be. We are living below our privileges, with less of life than might be ours. Our life is lower, slower, colder than it should be. We have our faith; but we have not the same fearless confidence in what we say we believe. We have a little love; but it has lost its warmth. We pray still; but our prayers are forced and formal, not the simple, happy outpouring of a full heart. We speak of Christ; but there is not the glow of affection with every word. We have our part in Christian service; but there is no enthusiasm in it.

There are many influences about us that cool us down, and deaden the best in us, that paralyse and bind the soul like the frost-fetters that hold the earth in the hard days of winter. We need the Spirit of God who comes like the spring-time. 'He restoreth my soul.' Revival is not for the dead, but for the living. It comes when life is being diminished and lost—a quickening breath.

3. Let us remember these two things about this reviving. It comes from God, and it means gladness. 'Wilt *thou* not revive us again, that thy people *may rejoice* in thee?'

(1) There is a mystery about life; and the very mystery of it makes us feel that it is beyond our ken and control. We must leave this mysterious gift in the hand of the mysterious God. And as of life itself, so of this more abundant life. As the beginnings of life, so the renewings and revivings. These are from God. There is no life without His Spirit; and every revival is another brooding, another breathing, another coming of the Spirit of God.

This is the Old Testament view of the world. It exists in absolute dependence upon God, the Creator. Especially in the spring-time God's presence was manifest; and the psalmists were sensible of it. 'Thou renewest the face of the earth.' 'Thou visitest the earth and waterest it. Thou blessest the springing thereof.' A Divine breath has touched the world. 'The breath of spring,' we say—the soft, westland breeze that has the gentle, genial, reviving touch. 'The wind bloweth'—it is Christ's figure for the Spirit of God, for the Divine in human life, for all those spiritual influences which flow in upon us, and which come from God. And, like the wind, it is beyond our command and control. We can only wait for it as we wait for God; but while we wait we pray. This verse is a prayer. 'Wilt thou not revive us again?' And God, who does not disappoint the seed, but gives it all the life for which it longs, does not disappoint the soul of His child.

A hint of softness in the air,
The answering note to Nature's prayer:
Spring's wondrous miracle to be—
Let it be springtime, Lord, to me!

Long have I dwelt in winter's night,
When moon and stars withheld their light,
With raging winds and roaring sea—
Let it be springtime, Lord, to me!

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

(2) This is the result—joy and gladness. The time of reviving is the time of rejoicing. There is no happier time in all the year than the weeks of spring. It is the time of brightness and beauty and bounty, and above all, the time of promise and of hope. This is its chief charm, this youthful, hopeful feeling. We feel that the year is before us now; and the tender beauty of the beginnings is all the greater that we see in them the promise of more and more. There are flowers, but there will be many more. There are green blades, but there will be golden sheaves. There are songs though the singers are few, but the chorus of the year is yet to come. This is the gladness of the spring-time; and this is the joy of every time of reviving—it is but the beginning of a larger blessing.

Look at some lovely scene—this orchard in blossom, this garden in the pride of its flowers. 'It is at its best,' we say. 'Ah! it is past its best.' It is never so of Christian experience and Christian character—never past its best, never come to its best. For this whole life of ours is but the spring-time of a year. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' And when we think of heaven, we think of summer—the summer of the sons of God and the crowning of the year. But there is an old hymn that is wiser. The sweetest of the seasons is not summer, but spring; and life would lose its gladness if it lost this peculiar note of endless expectation and hope. So this wise hymn says, 'There everlasting spring abides.' A life ever satisfied yet ever seeking, ever having yet ever hoping, never losing this happy element of promise, of eternal progress and increase! It is the loveliest thing on earth—the everlasting youthfulness of the soul renewed in Christ; and it is likest heaven.

¶ There is a very beautiful monument by Chantrey in Lichfield Cathedral; it is called the Snowdrop Monument. It is of marble, and commemorates two little girls who died. The monument represents them lying asleep with their arms about one another, and in the hand of the younger there is a bunch of snowdrops—the snowdrops of promise.[1]

[1] J. Eames, *The Shattered Temple*, 176.

Listening

Ps. lxxxv. 8.—'I will hear what God the Lord will speak.'

THE most suggestive and stimulating thing in this Psalm is the eighth verse, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak'—and round that, as its natural centre, is grouped the whole thought and music of the piece. Before this point is reached, the mood is one of prayer, and of troubled prayer. There is memory of God's goodness, but a doubt as to what the future will bring—an air of hesitation and fear. Then comes the great thought, and, however it happened, the music changes. 'For he will speak peace unto his people' follows, and from now to the end of the Psalm all is happiness and peace. There is no more fear or doubt—no more prayer even; only recognition of what God has done and is doing, and gladness and acceptance.

If the writer did not definitely mean to suggest this, he wrote better than he knew; for he has touched the great experience in life—whether in the life of art, or science, or religion—and he has given it in this verse, clear and beautiful.

'I will hear what God the Lord will speak,' he says, and it seems an obvious thing to say. But when we look into it, it is not so easy to do.

1. *Science.*—Let us begin with science. Man's struggle with Nature began earlier than any date to which historians can take us back. This may not seem precisely our common use of the term science, but science began with human need. How did primitive man make his first boat? We have to conjecture a good deal here, but we have a little evidence. He watched Nature, and he saw what she did. A stone sank in water, and a tree trunk swam, and man took in the fact. He learnt the use of fire, and by patient watching and experiment he learnt also how to make it and how to keep it when he got it. Then he tried an experiment and then a series of experiments, and at last achieved a boat burnt out of a tree trunk, and shaped by fire and stone to just that build and just those curves that would enable it to stay right side up, and hinder its own progress least. The man who built the first boat in any tribe was essentially a listener to the voice of God. He

was done with anticipating; he was resolved to have the fact, and he put himself to the pains of letting the fact assert itself—and then he used it triumphantly.

There are many things that mark off the nineteenth century from all before it, and perhaps none more than the great change in scientific method. Theory and guesswork were abandoned for investigation. The ancient man of science made extraordinarily brilliant guesses, and extraordinarily bad ones. He was always ready with a variety of splendid explanations of any fact proposed, but he did not verify the fact. There are in natural history quite a number of monstrous tales of the longest and most respectable pedigree—the ancients knew them, and the Oriental of to-day repeats them. Such and such an animal did certain things and this was the explanation. The drawback was that no one thought it worth while to question the tale and to see what the animal actually did. Did swallows lie clustered in bunches at the bottom of English ponds all the winter? Even White of Selborne clung to the idea that they stay with us, hidden away in a torpid state. But from the Renaissance onward, scientific progress has been increasingly sound and swift along the lines of observation and verification. What is the *fact* has been the question, and nothing else would serve.

The result is evident to every one in the rapid change of the habits and life of the individual man and of society. The material world is infinitely more available than it was. Steam, gas, electricity—all the things that serve our convenience and our health—have been achieved, primarily by the disinterested man of science who listened to the voice of Nature, who was more interested in learning from herself what she was doing and what she meant to do than in 'anticipating' her and accounting for her. After him came the other type of man, with the practical turn, who again listened, and then applied his knowledge. His story and that of the earliest boat-builder are one and the same. Everything comes to him who will listen.

2. *Art.*—In art the secret is the same. A real portrait is impossible till the painter has surrendered to his sitter, has studied his features, followed his moods, listened to his talk, and caught his mind. He surrenders initiative, so to speak, and takes what is given him. 'It is one mark of a great dramatist,' says Dr Morrison,[1] 'that he loses himself in the beings he creates. He does not make them speak; it is rather as if he listened to them speaking. Dickens used to laugh heartily at the comical things Sam Weller said, as though he were hearing them for the first time.' The greatest painters and the greatest poets do the same thing, but in the supreme way, that portrait-painters and novelists and primitive boat-builders have to do.

¶ Wordsworth's *Prelude* is the story of how he left off anticipating and planning and prophesying, and began to listen and to accept. He went through a great crisis and 'yielded up moral questions in despair.' Then, led by his sister, he began to watch Nature, and a change came over him.

> Nature's self
> By all varieties of human love
> Assisted, led me back,

till he became Nature's great interpreter to these ages, and at last found, as he says,

> Once more in Man an object of delight,
> Of pure imagination, and of love.

He makes no secret of his discovery. 'Come forth into the light of things,' he says; 'let Nature be your teacher.' 'Come forth and bring with you a heart that watches and receives.'[2]

3. *Religion.*—Now, if we turn to the sphere of religion, it will be natural to expect to find the same law true, that the best comes by listening. We shall expect this because the universe and all its life seem to have a certain unity, but we must be careful not to be in a hurry here. Speculation is native to man—'the unexamined life,' as Plato says, 'is un-live-able for a human being'—and verification in this region is slow work and difficult. The very word 'Theology' might be said to lead us astray. It is 'talking about God' rather than listening to Him; and it is not by means of discussion that the great advances have been made, useful as discussion has been in raising questions and calling attention to facts. So far as we can learn the

[1] *Christ in Shakespeare*, 13. [2] T. R. Glover.

history of man's conception of God it has grown in a very simple way. It would be a wonderful thing to re-capture, if we could, the very thoughts of those remote ancestors of ours who first formulated their experience of Something-Not-Themselves, and to trace how, age by age, they re-shaped their conceptions of the great Environing in the light of experience, watching how thought acted on life and life on thought. The real progress has been made by listening. This and that, men said, their fathers had told them; but quite other was the voice of life. God was not what men said; He was what He revealed Himself to be, what He revealed in the growth of moral and social ideas and ideals. God was re-interpreted in the light of human character as it went beyond the traditional conceptions. Plato's attack on old notions, in the light of new experience of righteousness and of law, is the great instance in classical literature of the progress made by the man who listens to life. The Christian movement is another great step. There, in plain fact, ancient theory, held by the strongest thinkers and fortified by all that tradition and speculation (honourable and sincere, both of them) could do, was borne down and abolished for ever by the men who, for love of the Jesus whom they had known, had been willing to listen to God speaking through His life.

Theory enmeshes us all, insidious beyond our fancy. It is the hardest thing to hear what God says. We anticipate what He must say, and how He must say it. He speaks, we know, through church, synagogue, tradition, Bible; and we know all about these things; we can define them, and we shall recognize God's voice as it comes through them. But if it comes in another way? If God chooses to speak to us by making church and synagogue, tradition and Bible, impossible for us? If they become questionable? How shall we find Him? Only by listening and letting Him speak in His own way. The religious life begins only when we decisively say 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak,' and, as we say it, accept His own method of speaking, however surprising and unlikely.

'He will speak peace'—and does He not speak peace? What peace is there in battling with facts—the hardest things God makes? Surrender is the beginning of peace as it is of truth. It is because Jesus knew the voice of God, and could say 'Thy will be done,' that He had such peace as we know in Him. 'In his will is our peace,' said Dante, and it is only by listening that we can learn His will. When once a man will make the surrender implied in listening, obedience follows of itself. It is, at last, the life in harmony with Nature—what is more than that, in harmony with God.

The Divided Heart

Ps. lxxxvi. 11.—'Unite my heart to fear thy name.'

Everyone is familiar with Robert Louis Stevenson's striking story entitled *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.* The real basis of that story is the idea of the duality of personality. The wonder-working potion, and the miraculous change of face and form are merely part of the story-teller's outfit. But the duality of personality is far more than the imagination of a novelist, it is a fact of human experience. We are not single, we are double. Perhaps we are more than double. The poor demoniac at Gadara felt that he was a multitude. It was a broken, divided, discordant personality of which he was conscious. And if we are not conscious of being a multitude, at any rate we are conscious that we are not single. Ever since sin entered the world human nature has been divided and discordant. We can distinctly hear two different and contradictory voices—both of them our own. The heart is a perpetual battlefield. There is a Higher Self and a Lower Self, and these two make ceaseless war within us.

Round this same fact of experience—divided personality—W. J. Locke has woven a short story, which he calls *Pontifex.* The hero is a certain Richard Westoby—a thoroughly likeable man with strong family affections. But his heart was not at peace, for he was haunted by a sin of his youth. It was a sin that he would hardly admit to himself, and eventually, after being shell-shocked in the war, he projected the evil into the person of one 'Pontifex.' 'What he looks like? Well'—he hesitated—'he looks very much like me. Same build and colouring—ordinary looking fellow.' It became the one object of his life to protect his family from this Pontifex.

And so in the disordered state of his mind

the end comes. There was the sharp report of a shot and crash. 'I told you I'd face the music myself. I told you you only had to leave it to me.' He allowed them to pass him. He pointed to the hearth-rug.

'There, thank God, that's the end of him!'

They stared. There was nothing on the hearth-rug. Above the chimney-piece hung a shattered mirror.

But the poor disordered personality could stand no more. This was the end. 'He gave a curious little cry, clutched at his heart, reeled and fell. He was dead.'

The case of Richard Westoby is more like our own than is that of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. For we are not Dr Jekyll at one time and Mr Hyde at another, we are at one and the same time Richard Westoby and Pontifex. This matter of dual personality is not only a fact of experience. It is also a truth of Holy Scripture. Paul declares in that moving seventh of Romans that on looking into himself he found two opposing principles at work. He found, first of all, a law of God in which he delighted after the inward man; but he found also a different law in his members which brought him into subjection to sin. And between these two there was incessant war. 'For the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise.'

Our prayer must be, in the words of the Psalmist, 'unite my heart.' Behind that prayer lies the recognition that his heart was not one, it was two. And so he prays for a heart made one; and the unity he desires is unity of the right sort—unity in the love of what is holy and true and good.

1. *The Fact of the Divided Heart.*—Look out upon the world, and everywhere there is evidence of it. It is a world of men of divided hearts. The evil principle that fights against the good and disputes its rule—the world, the flesh, the law of the members, as the New Testament calls it; 'Mr Hyde,' as Stevenson personifies it—takes many a different guise. In the case of some it takes the form of *love of money*. Mammon divides the soul with God. That was how the case stood with the rich young ruler. And in the case of others, it takes the form of *love of pleasure*. That is how the case stood with the Prodigal in the story.

And even in cases where the pleasures indulged in are not in themselves sinful, they are allowed unduly to absorb the soul. The prevailing passion for amusement is sterilizing the soul for thousands and robbing God of His due. In their inordinate devotion to self-gratification, men encroach even upon the quiet of the Sabbath, and Sunday golf, Sunday tennis, Sunday bridge are becoming increasingly common. They cannot entirely stifle their aspirations after God, but these other and baser affections enter in and divide the heart and dwarf and mar the life.

The 'divided heart'—we all suffer from it. No heart amongst us all is absolutely single, entirely devoted to God.

2. *The Effects of the Divided Heart.*—There is first the truth, which is almost a truism, that *a divided heart means an unhappy heart.* The condition of perfect happiness is a perfectly united heart. Every trace of evil, every root of bitterness, has been taken out of the heart of the saints; they are what we can only aspire to be down here, 'ever, only, all for God,' and as a result they have 'fulness of joy.'

¶ Dr James Lindsay, well known through his philosophical writings, tells us that as a young man he experienced conflicting periods of religious reflection and concern and times of sheer worldly aim and absorption—that is to say, absorption in purely secular ambitions. 'These alternations,' he says, 'made my inner life deeply unsatisfying; so much so that, after profound mental exercise and spiritual reflection, I resolved to give up so divided a life, and, with that resolution, passed into the sunlight of spiritual certitude. I was in a new world and I remained in it from that time. My oft-shrinking will had found that, as Saint Augustine had so long before described, its divided allegiance *must* end, and the new experience begin of willing only for God.'[1]

In the second place, *a divided heart means an ineffective life.* 'Out of the heart,' said our Lord, 'are the issues of life'; but when the heart itself is divided and discordant, the life that issues from it cannot, in the nature of things, be strong, vigorous, positive, aggressive.

¶ In the actual experience of life, attempts at Dual Control have rarely, if ever, worked well. We tried Dual Control along with France in the War. But it was found absolutely necessary to

[1] *Autobiography of the Rev. James Lindsay, D.D.*, 18.

have a supreme commander-in-chief—hence the appointment of Marshal Foch. Unity of mind, concentration of purpose are essential to effectiveness of action.

The Bible type of the man of divided heart is Reuben. He had good emotions and impulses, but a weak will. He was all on the side of good at one moment, and then allowed himself to be swept into evil the next. And so Reuben became a thing of contempt and scorn. 'Unstable as water,' said his dying father about him, 'thou shalt not excel.' There may be room for the 'cross-bench mind' in politics—there is absolutely no room for the 'cross-bench' character in morals. To count on the side of right we must be entirely devoted to the right. The men who have done things, the men who have left their mark on the world, the men who have counted for righteousness, were men of single mind and definite purpose. 'This one thing I do,' said the Apostle.

¶ 'Having decided what was to be done,' says Emerson of Napoleon, 'he did that with might and main. He put out all his strength. He risked everything and spared nothing—neither ammunition, nor money, nor troops, nor generals, nor himself.'

And, once again, *a divided heart is unworthy of our God.* Our God is a great God, and He is God alone. He is, moreover, as the Old Testament puts it, a jealous God. Listen to the sweeping and uncompromising claim He makes: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' Some men try to put God off with their affections. Their sensibilities are easily touched; their emotions readily respond to the religious appeal. And some try to put God off with a sort of intellectual assent. They profess the great Christian doctrines. They give God their 'minds.' But God demands not only the emotions and the mind, but the will as well. He asks to be served with the 'strength.' Emotion and creed must be translated into life. And He asks to be served with all of these various parts of human nature. *All* the heart, *all* the soul, *all* the mind, *all* the strength have to be offered to Him.

3. *The Secret of the United Heart.*—It is only in the fear of God we can really unite the heart. We cannot unite the heart in the service of sin. The Divine that is in it will always be in a state of protest and rebellion. And we cannot entirely get rid of the Divine out of the soul. It is the Divine that makes the soul. It is in its very fabric and essence. We would have to destroy the soul itself before we could get rid of the Divine element in it. And the result is, we can never unite the soul in the service of self and sin. But we can unite the heart in the fear and love of God. The soul is eternally and essentially Divine. But the soul is not necessarily and eternally sinful. Sin is an intrusion in the soul. It came in against the will of God.

And now we have this second thought, that the gracious power of our Lord can unite the most divided heart. Locke's story ends on a note of tragedy, but Stevenson's is still more tragic. For there the conflict between the two personalities ends in the complete triumph of evil. But when we turn to the seventh chapter of Romans we read of another and far happier ending. Paul knew the misery of a divided and distracted heart! 'Who shall deliver me,' he cries, 'from the body of this death?' And then he answers his own question with something like a shout of triumph: 'Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!' Jesus had helped him to conquer his sin. He had brought peace to his soul by 'uniting his heart to fear God's name.'

Mind and soul, according well,
Shall make one music as before—but vaster!

The Mother of Us All

Ps. lxxxvii. 1-7.—'His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among them that know me; behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this one was born there. Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her; and the Most High himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the peoples, this one was born there. They that sing as well as they that dance shall say, all my fountains are in thee.' (R.V.)

We can see from the nations which he names that the Psalmist wrote when Assyria had gone down under the horizon, and when Babylon, a more tremendous oppressor, had risen into view; that is to say, he wrote in days of such penury and humiliation that it must have been

hard to believe that the sordid huddle of makeshift buildings which marked the site of Solomon's capital could ever have a future. A prophet might speak large things of the city of God, but when the people turned back to find their homes, sight made the prophecy incredible. It is not for nothing that a man is a native of a particular land, has learned its story and shared its fortunes, has been sneered at by foreigners for its sake, and has rejoiced in its honour as for some personal advantage. There is something below or, perhaps, above reason in the patriotic feeling which makes a people defy disaster, and keeps them to the end believing that their land will still be great. And in this man that noble unreason accounts for much. Jerusalem to him could never be like any other city. It was a city by itself, not only the capital of his nation but the city of God, and the mere mention of that name lifted his thoughts into a magical world in which anything was possible. The city of God, the Omnipotent, who cannot know defeat—his heart grew great at that true word; and yet the whole delusion of rhetoric lies in the name, for a man may easily claim for the city what is true only of the God. Isaiah made that error, and imagined that, since Jerusalem was the hearth, the dwelling-place of God, it must be unassailable. Rome has made that error, and taken to itself Christ's promise that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The very word 'Church' is full of peril. It means the Lord's house; and yet if we assume that the Church, since it is God's house, is bound to be right in the end, how great may be our error! So this singer makes a pause after the third verse, in order that he may not be swept away by mere rhetoric. 'Glorious things,' indeed, but how are they to be made credible? not by reciting some watchword as if it were a charm, or by naming a great name like the city of God. The city may be forgotten; a Church, once a true house of the living God, may be left desolate; but there is that below the city which is not subject to change.

1. In his abrupt, trenchant way, he says without any preface, 'God's foundation is in the holy mountains,' in which he makes a sudden cut at the inner fact. Jerusalem stood on four hills connected with each other, two and two, in a sort of double spur, one of the natural, defensible sites of the old world; and the rock rising up from the surrounding valleys appealed to this man's imagination as a symbol of an underlying perpetuity. The city might grow rich again, and marble take the place of mud; the people might advance in wealth and consequence, and the ruler's power might spread afar, but no such prosperity would help his assurance. These things might come and go; they are of the surface, whilst his interest lay below, in the rock. That is a difference of perpetual moment. 'Glorious things are said of the city of God,' and true things, but where are we to look for the security of them? Is the power of the Church to be attested by the pomp and wealth which it commands and the great names which can be quoted on its side? There is no Church which has always resisted the temptation to measure success by standards such as these, or to kindle enthusiasm in its members by essentially worldly appeals. My hope, says this man, is not in the look of things, whether that be encouraging or not, but in the reality of things; not in the city, but in the rock.

Which do we believe in—the city or the foundation? the seen or the unseen? As Christian people we have learned to believe in a vast extension, some day, of the Church of Christ; but the question remains as to the level on which we are looking for that. This poet, in effect, says that Zion is to prevail, and to be exalted as an unseen and spiritual force.

In another age, Jesus took up that question afresh and pushed it home. His attitude towards any force which was mainly physical was nothing less than contemptuous. To Pilate, armed with the omnipotence of Rome, He said, 'Thou couldest have no power at all against me.' He felt that any man could make way for a while and win applause, if he would stoop for it; but He Himself refused to stoop, counting that a worshipping of Satan. 'My kingdom,' said Jesus, 'is not of this world,' and My victory comes by processes as silent as the working of leaven, as the dawning of light, as the gathering of 'dew which tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' There is no lesson so hard to learn as this—to believe in the power of Jesus Christ as a spiritual thing.

'His foundation is in the holy mountains,' said this man, striking straight at essential fact. The city might perish out of sight; churches may come down, and no Church is indispensable to God; all visible institutions may be discredited. 'But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all,' says Paul, alluding to the words of this Psalm; and there, at last, we see the promise disengaged from its corporeal part. The earthly city, the visible church, the time-honoured institution, has fallen off like a burst chrysalis, for the really potent thing is heavenly and unseen.

¶ 'The Church is not a thing like the Athenæum Club,' he cried. 'If the Athenæum Club lost all its members, the Athenæum Club would dissolve and cease to exist. But when we belong to the Church we belong to something which is outside all of us: which is outside everything you talk about, outside the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to them.'[1]

2. This thought of Zion as a power of religion in the world was the chief reason for this man's belief in her future; but it was helped by his magnanimous way of looking at men and of thinking about God.

(1) The witness which comes from many ages and lands is that the narrower the heart of a Church is, the less of hope it is able to cherish for the world. Dean Stanley tells how on Easter Day, when Russians meet each other with the glad greeting and response, 'Christ is risen,' 'Yes, He is risen indeed,' the older sect reply, 'Our Christ is risen, but not yours.' Congregations or sects in no way lose their self-importance as their membership declines; old jealousies assert themselves, suspicions of other people's loyalty or orthodoxy, and contentment with their own; and in that atmosphere there is no purifying of hearts. The old grudges live on, and feuds are remembered when the power to strike has long since passed away. In that temper the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ is inconceivable. It is good to know God as our own God, and without that no worthy religion is possible; but no one will ever know God aright who thinks Him all his own. A Church must be generous in her judgments of other Churches in order to be hopefully missionary. In this Psalm each of the names mentioned might have awakened memories of old hate and of all that Israel had missed; Rahab—that glowing life of Egypt, rich in learning and in commerce, in art and war; the Philistines, who so doggedly had fought against the sons of light, and had left their mark on so many shameful pages of Jewish history; Tyre, the mistress of the farther seas, sitting at the gates of East and West, and gorgeous with the abundance of both; Babylon, which, from her summits of pride, had made the Hebrews know the depths of degradation and despair. Each name had its suggestion of intolerable wrong, and it would seem no more than natural if Israel had looked to God to avenge them of their oppressors. But instead, so magnanimous is the temper of this poet, he looks to see them coming in along with Israel, citizens of equal right in the city of God. It is not wonderful that hope should prove triumphant in a heart so large and kind.

If our hope is to grow, we must seek for the increase of it in this quarter—in a kindlier judgment of those whom we dislike, and those who differ from us, and those whom we do not understand. One power by which faith in the world's future is maintained is the continual sacrifice of jealousies and narrowness of heart.

¶ I find it impossible to think that Christ could sanction many of our accepted conventions, and especially those which cause Christians to be separated from one another by barriers of intellectual apprehension. At the moment, if a priest of the Church of England gives the Holy Communion to a devout follower of Jesus Christ who is not of his own persuasion, he is in effect told by Authority that while he has doubtless performed a Christian action, he has committed a kind of ecclesiastical foul which must not be done again. Can this spirit be attributed to Jesus Christ, or is it that we have come to care more for the prestige of our own Church and the niceties of 'Church order' than for the Spirit of our Lord Himself?[1]

(2) And just as needful is a large and generous thought of God. Many people in the Church of Jesus have no other expectation and no other plan of converting the world than by bringing men to their own peculiar way of thinking. Conversion, as understood by them, is not simply conversion to Christ, but to Christ as He is conceived in a particular school; and such a notion makes the conversion of the world in-

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross.*

[1] H. R. L. Sheppard, *The Impatience of a Parson*, 73.

conceivable, and, one might add, it makes it a doubtfully desirable thing. A Church may be rightly persuaded that it knows something of the truth of God, but no Church knows all the truth; and a world-wide extension of one set of articles of faith would be an enormous calamity. Paul's prayer was that 'through the Church there might be known the many-coloured wisdom of God.' The world is big, and all its nations have character and peculiarity of their own. Hearts do not everywhere beat in the same measure; and passion, and judgment, and the creative imagination exist in ever-varying degrees; so it cannot but be true that new discoveries will continually be made of the depth and fulness of the thoughts of the Almighty.

¶ A firm believer in her own creed, which meant so much to her, Adèle Kamm could yet quite well understand that an entirely different form of faith might be more acceptable to other minds. 'The longer I live,' she wrote to Mr H., 'the more I perceive that every expression of religious truth is imperfect, and that the most elementary form has a value of its own as well as the most enlightened. I see that there is really only one religion, *i.e.* that which Christ instituted when He said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." We are all brethren, weak and sinful creatures, for whom Christ died!'[1]

This man saw that his way was not the only way, and that the true Zion in which God delights was not the little, parochial Zion of Josiah, and Hezekiah, and Asa; it was a Zion in which even Rahab, the superb, would be proud to have a place—a Zion with room within it for many differences, a Church very lightsome and very large. Strangers, coming to God, were not to come in on any terms of inferiority, to enjoy bare rights of toleration. Their place must be as sure as ours, their right as clear—a right of birth, not of favour or of patronage. In a very beautiful way, the poet makes entrance easy for the stranger, for it is not any officer of Israel who keeps the roll of citizens; it is God Himself who writes up the people, and who rejoices as He notes that strangers have now the privileges of sons. And those who thus receive God's welcome are glad at heart. 'With singing and dancing,' says the poet, they declare that they find all that their thirsting nature needs in God.

[1] P. Seippel, *A Living Witness*, 209.

Faith in the extension of God's Kingdom is renewed by influences like these. Men are not left to be tossed on the tide of experience, at the mercy of every change of circumstance. They know whom they have believed; they know the power of the spiritual things, and thus they are ever of good cheer.

David My Servant

Ps. lxxxix. 20.—'I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.'

1. Why is it that the story of this old Hebrew monarch has more power not only to enlist the affections but to move the wills of men than all the praises of virtue that have ever been sung? Criticism has been very busy with the Psalms, and is loth to leave us in possession of the idea that even one of those Divine meditations was conceived in the heart of the sweet singer of Israel. Yet what Christian man who recalls the familiar metaphor that expresses the tender care of the heavenly Father does not think of David? 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'

Plato draws a picture of the philosopher king, and the most cultured among us are bound to confess that after all he is an unconscionable prig. The high-souled man, of whom Aristotle writes, walking circumspectly between excess and defect along the middle way of perfect conduct, would be a very dull person to meet. And those descriptions of the virtues—justice, temperance, fortitude—which have been the commonplaces of moral philosophy, have no power to inspire the reader with the desire of attainment. No doubt they have their place in the training of character. St Paul has sufficient sympathy with the Greek mind to bid us Christians to the contemplation of the nobler qualities of the human soul. 'If there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.'

But the general impression which an abstract discussion of the virtues is apt to leave upon the mind is surely one of unreality. Virtues, almost as much as happiness, are only achieved on condition that they are not sought. The man who deliberately spends his time in their cultivation mars the spontaneity of goodness by a suspicion of professionalism, and would

seem to suggest nothing more forcibly than Fielding's well-known portraiture of the philosopher Square.

If a story like that of David holds us with a spell that no descriptions of virtue, however enthusiastic, are able to cast, its effect is something very different from the appeal to our imagination which is made by the great creations of literature, whether in the play or in the novel. In all personalities which are the product of imagination there is the element of caricature. Charterhouse never knew a brother who was quite like Thomas Newcome. There never was an egoist like Sir Willoughby Patterne. Even Cordelia is too self-conscious to have found a footing on the earth more substantial than the boards of Sadler's Wells. For, if all the world be a stage, it is not wholly true to describe all its men and women as merely players. The real world in which we find ourselves is composed, not of types of character which it is the object of their actions to illustrate and express, but of personal beings with beliefs, hopes, fears, desires that are seeking to satisfy themselves moment by moment in what are often the fitful volitions of their daily life. What do they believe? What do they hope, or fear? What are the objects upon which their desires fasten? These are the things that awaken our interest, inspire our enthusiasm, and stimulate our wills, when we contemplate our fellowmen. It is in the pursuit of kindred purposes and not in mutual admiration that genuine friendships move and live.

Here, then, is the true secret of the influence which the men and women of the Bible exercise not only over our imagination, but upon our lives also. We are not offered for our instruction conceptions of what the holy ought to be, with just enough of human sin and infirmity deftly introduced into the picture to give verisimilitude to what our intelligence might otherwise regard as an artificial and improbable tale. These stories are as much the record of what men have been and done, as the Psalms are the expression of what they have thought and felt. The failures and achievements of the one, like the depressions and aspirations of the other, belong to beings who reveal that same 'piebald miscellany' which each one of us recognizes in the experience of his own personality. 'Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed.' David was following the ewes, and God took him.

2. Look at the life of David and you will find much in it that none would desire either to approve or to emulate. His great sin stands reproved on the forefront of Scripture itself, but we think rather of many details of his career which reveal his moral standard or his human passions, and which have been allowed to pass without censure by the prophetic historian. We admire the fearless courage with which David defends his flock against the lion and the bear, the quiet confidence with which he meets the champion of the Philistines, his magnanimity towards Saul, his tender friendship for Jonathan. We are infinitely touched by his laments for the Lord's Anointed, for Abner, for Absalom. His family affection, his chivalry, his lofty conception of the kingly office, his readiness to bear the consequences of his own mistakes, the loyalty which he shows towards his servants, his friends, his people—all these at once constitute a claim upon the reverent regard of mankind.

But there are other incidents in his life and other features in his character. These appear inconsistent with such nobility only so long as we persist in supposing that the spirit of man is a collection of virtues and vices which rub up against one another within each human being, rival personalities that neutralize each other's activity. There is, for example, the lawlessness of the freebooter, the revengeful vows, the wars of extermination, the sensual indulgence of the Oriental monarch, the treacherous recommendation of pardoned enemies to the posthumous vengeance of a successor. David belongs not to the region of romance, but to the realm of reality in which men struggle onward amid the tangle of circumstances and in the twilight of moral imperfection towards a goal which they themselves only dimly discern.

¶ David's life and history I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, down as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew. Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking, in truth,

always that: 'A succession of falls'? Man can do no other. In this wild element of a life he has to struggle onwards; now fallen, deep-abased; and ever, with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again still onwards. That his struggle be a faithful unconquerable one: that is the question of questions.[1]

3. What practically interests us in the lives of real men is not the graces of character they exemplify, but the principles by which they live, the objects in which their belief centres. The loyalty, for example, which bound Dr Liddon to his master Pusey meant not an exact imitation of his character, which would have been singularly unsuccessful, but a scrupulous adherence to his Church principles. The hero-worship which surrounded Mr Gladstone was fruitful not in the cultivation of his characteristics, which would have been infinitely trying, but in fidelity to his political ideals. A man's secret is always something which is beyond himself. And so it is with David. The God in whom he trusts, the Lord who is his Shepherd, is the legacy which the shepherd King of Israel has left to succeeding generations. It is the oil of the heavenly anointing that consecrates his life and transforms his career into a service. 'I have found David my servant.' Nothing that he himself possesses does he bequeath to the world. It is the fact that he was himself possessed, gripped by the mighty Hand, grasped by the Eternal Purpose, which awakens in every faithful and true heart the spirit of obedience and trust. It is neither his prudence nor his fidelity, nor his courage, but his religion which from him passes over as a motive power to other lives.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the story of his great sin. David's fall had nothing to do with the relative proportions of strength and weakness in what is at best an imperfect character. It was a collapse of everything in which it might be supposed that a man could put his trust. Disaster overtook him on his strong side. That loyal spirit of friendship, which had again and again manifested itself in noble and chivalrous action, was replaced by mean and murderous treachery. He forgot God.

The Bible is never more true to human experience than when it represents the fall of David as the result of a sad oblivion which in the hour of a great temptation obscured the guiding principle of his life. That is why David reveals to us, not less in the accusing presence of Nathan than amid the praises of Zion, the secret of spiritual manhood. It rests not upon the acquisition of settled habit, but upon the vision of a victorious and redeeming God. Yes, a redeeming God! That is the power which these men and women of the Bible are able to hand on to us, a power which no system of ethics, no eulogies of virtue, nor yet the sublime contemplation of the beauty of holiness, can ever bestow. Have we never felt, when a sin has been committed, as though self-respect were a treasure that we could never regain? The past, with all its virtues, all the moral victories which it has witnessed, seems to have passed away like the baseless fabric of a dream. The example of good men appears a mockery of our broken life, and the appeal to our best self seems to be made to a being in the existence of which we scarcely dare to believe. Even then let our fainting souls take courage.

Our best self is our God. Cry aloud with the stricken king, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Listen to the word of Him whose mercies are new every morning: 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin.'

'My sin!' the low despairing sigh;
'My sin!' the exceeding bitter cry,
Out of those depths is heard on high:

Glad angels hear it where they stand,
And wait—a ministering band—
Their Lord's permission and command;

It comes—and swiftly, down from heaven
A light whereby the gloom is riven!
A voice of power and peace, 'Forgiven!'[1]

[1] Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship.*

God Our Home

Ps. xc. 1.—'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.'

The sad and stately music of this great Psalm, singing of the mortality of man in immortal words, befits the funeral hymn of humanity.

[1] S. J. Stone, *Poems and Hymns*, 102.

Like the God of whom it sings, it has been, for ages uncounted, an asylum for pilgrim souls. As some old 'ancestral home shelters generation after generation of a family, and in its solid strength stands unmoved, while one after another of its somewhile tenants is borne forth to the grave, and the descendants sit in the halls where for centuries before their ancestors sat,' so God is the home of all who find any real home amidst the fluctuating shadows of time.

Hebrew tradition describes this Psalm as the prayer of Moses, the man of God. Its author, whoever he was, must have been a man grown grey with a vast experience. Touched by the twilights of time, he meditates and prays. It is lofty poetry, but pensive, even mournful—as of the autumnal glory of a great leafy wood when the leaves are falling.

And what is Man, pursued of time and overtaken by death? His life, even at its longest, is as a watch in the night, as the grass that flourishes in the morning and withers at eventime, so quickly is he cut down. There is the swift passing of time, the numbering of our days, the story of our brief leasehold of threescore years and ten, full of labour and sorrow. But that is not the conclusion of the whole matter, nor is man utterly cast down. The Bible does not close on a note so sad and haunting. It tells us the simple truth, makes us pause and take breath and ponder. Frail we are and vanishing, here to-day and to-morrow gone, but we are not the companions of the perishing flowers; we are heirs of a Divine beauty that fadeth not away. As upon the delicate petal of the lily God imprints His thoughts of whiteness, so upon the soul of man, whose day is a span, He imprints His image and the glow of His eternal beauty. It is by fellowship with things that are eternal that man is made master of the chances and changes of the year—set free from the tyranny of time and the terror of the tomb.

1. There are times, as we all know, when the universe is our home, and others when we are homeless in it—exiles amid familiar scenes, smitten with world-strangeness, forlorn and lonely. Often we are homeless in the midst of friends, and, again, we are at home in the infinity of the wilderness. Below all other desires, if he will search his heart, man finds the wistful longing to exchange the precarious finite home for one secure and infinite; for, if his home is in eternity, it cannot be left or destroyed. But we ourselves, as all our teachers tell us, can make a home of the universe, or be homeless in it, according to our way of thinking and acting, and, above all, by the wisdom and power of faith. It is injustice, cruelty, and the inhumanity of man to man that makes us homeless wanderers in the world! It is no wonder that heaven seems remote and unreal, and the beat of the mighty Father-heart is faint and far off. When will man learn that he cannot know God, cannot be at home in this universe so long as he is unbrotherly and uncharitable. It is only when we do justly, and love mercy, that we can walk with God, and know that He walks with us, making the world a home.

2. The Psalmist connects this homelessness of man with his sin. 'Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance'; therefore 'we spend our years as a tale that is told.' Always it is a deplorable consequence of sin that it estranges men, isolates them from God and also from each other. The prodigal's selfishness soon drives him along that journey into the far country; and the most desolate picture of the final ruin of sin is in those words which our Saviour used to speak so sorrowfully, 'the outer darkness.' When the prophets and many more from east and west and north and south sat down at the family feast, there were some left outside homeless. It was their sin that had shut them out, their selfishness and pride and angry rejection of God's goodness. That is what sin is always doing, in this world as well as in the world to come: it shuts men out. Selfishness, pride, malice, distrust—they shut a man out from any home, from every home.

¶ Hawthorne, in one of his stories, tells of a young girl, an artist at Rome, who felt such a curse falling upon her, not for sin of her own, but because she had witnessed another's crime. 'This awful loneliness enveloped her whithersoever she went. It was a shadow in the sunshine of festal days; a mist between her eyes and the pictures at which she strove to look; a chill dungeon, which kept her in its gray twilight and fed her with its unwholesome air.' Afterwards, when she found words to tell

another her trouble, she said: 'I am a motherless girl, and a stranger here in Italy. I had only God to take care of me and be my closest friend; and the terrible crime thrust itself between Him and me; so that I groped for Him in the darkness, as it were, and found Him not; found nothing but a dreadful solitude, and this crime in the midst of it.' For a little while, suffering for another's sin, the poor girl felt the horror of the outer darkness falling about her.

They seemed alone
Those prisoners through all time. Each soul shut fast
In its own goal of woe. Apart, alone,
Forevermore alone. No thought of kin,
Or kindly human glance, or fellowship
Of suffering or of sin, made light the load
Of solitary pain. . . .
. . . Hopeless sin
Rots slow in solitude, nor sees the face
Of men, nor hears the sound of speech, nor feels
The touch of human hand, but broods a ghost
Hating the bare blank cell—the other self
Which brought it thither—hating man and God,
And all that is or has been.[1]

3. There is a home always ready for all. The real House of Life, the home of the soul, is in God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. He has been our dwelling-place in all generations, our help in ages past, our hope in times to come, and to know God is to be at home. From Him we come forth in the morning, in Him we live and move and have our being, and to Him we return at eventide—'when that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home.'

God is our dwelling-place—our refuge according to the Prayer-Book version—our home. The word recalls what ought to be to us the most alluring and radiant spot on earth. It is the spot in which are centred our fondest affections, and it contains in it the hopes of all the purity and goodness which are to come hereafter. Home means a certain atmosphere, indefinable and indescribable. It means a certain communion which is so sensitive and refined as to be almost independent of speech. Home means a freedom whose very simplicity is its defence. It means love, deep as life and deeper than death. Let us think of all these riches and we may then begin to feel the amazing welcome and the boundless grace that are hidden in this old familiar word, 'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.'

[1] Lewis Morris, *The Epic of Hades.*

¶ As one contemplates Mr Gladstone's triumphs, one finds oneself recurring in memory to the beautiful background of domestic quiet and stately dignity in which he was as much or more at home than in the public gaze. I can see him now in an old wideawake and cloak—trudging off in the drizzle of an October morning to an early service. And I remember how I came one evening at a later date to dine at Hawarden, and was shown into a little half-lit ante-room next the dining-room. He was just at the beginning of his last illness, and he was suffering from discomfort and weakness. There on a sofa he sat, side by side with Mrs Gladstone; they were sitting in silence, hand in hand, like two children, the old warrior and his devoted wife. It seemed almost too sacred a thing to have seen; but it is not too sacred to record, for it seemed the one last perfect transfiguring touch of love and home.[1]

4. We have heard much in recent years of the indwelling of God in man. It is a profound and precious truth, revealing the greatness of the soul, explaining its hunger for the Infinite, and lending authenticity to its instincts and intuitions. But it is not the whole truth. What we now need is a new and profound sense of the transcendence of God, of His immeasurable greatness and goodness. True, God lives in us, but we also need to know that we live in Him, ensphered in His life and love and power from everlasting to everlasting. This is the deep, unconfessed faith of humanity. When this truth stands fully revealed the words of Hinton have a new meaning: 'We are near home; may we be homelike!' Indeed yes, if we open our hearts to know Him 'in whom we live and move and have our being,' as a bird trusts itself to the air in which it flies. Santa Teresa had a House of Life, the Upper Room of which was a place of prayer, and there she had the joy of home 'as the great angels have it, untold and hidden.' Each of us may know that joy, like the old man in the Faber poem, of whom the poet said:

[1] A. C. Benson, *Along the Road*, 53.

Always his downcast eye
Was laughing silently,
As if he found some jubilee in thinking;
For his one thought was God,
In that one thought he abode,
For ever in that thought more deeply sinking.

¶ In *A Student in Arms* Donald Hankey tells us a bit of war experience which was probably his own. The soldier is wounded and lies on the field. 'At last he must have lost consciousness, for he woke to find that the sun had set, and all was still but for an occasional flare or shot. He suddenly felt terribly small and lonely, and he was so very, very weak. He was cut off from his fellow-men as surely as if he had been on a desert island, and he felt, somehow, as if he had got out of his element, and was launched, a tiny, pigmy soul, on the sea of immensity, where he could find no bearings. Eternity and Infinity were so pitiless and uncomprehending. The stars gazed at him imperturbably. There was no sympathy there, only cold, unseeing tolerance. Yet, after all, he had the advantage of them. For all his pigmy ineffectiveness, he was of finer stuff than they. At least, he could feel—suffer. He had only to try to move to verify that. At least he was aware of his own existence, and could gauge his own insignificance. There was that in him which was not in them, unless it was in everything. "God!" he whispered softly. "God everywhere!" Then into his tired brain came a new phrase, "Underneath are the Everlasting Arms."'

The Right Use of Time

Ps. xc. 12.—'So teach us to number our days, that we may get us an heart of wisdom.' (R.V.)

'This Psalm,' says Isaac Taylor, 'may be cited as perhaps the most sublime of human compositions, the deepest in feeling, the loftiest in theological conception, the most magnificent in its imagery.' The twelfth verse is the keynote of the Psalm. It numbers sadly the days and vicissitudes of human life; but it does this, not for the sake of mere sentiment, but rather for practical purposes, that it may furnish a motive for a wiser life of the heart.

1. The first thing in the numbering of our days is to see that we have *the right end* in view—this end, 'that we may get us an heart of wisdom.' Now it is needful to remember that we must give a much wider interpretation to the word 'heart' than is accorded to it in modern usage. Nowadays it has been degraded until it suggests and comprehends the emotional life only. But to express the Old Testament meaning we must add the factors of the mind and will. It is a masculine word, describing the allied forces of the inner life. And the Psalmist's purpose is that the whole of this spiritual army should be possessed and illumined by 'wisdom.' It is needful, again, to remember that 'wisdom' is more than knowledge. It is the supreme light of the Divine, the irradiation which springs from intimate and constant fellowship with God. And therefore the prayer of the Psalmist expresses a pleading for a holy light which shall illumine mind and heart and will, and so transfigure the life in its character and conduct.

(1) Wisdom is not money. What is material wealth—houses, ships, lands, money—compared with the high and lofty characteristics of mind when it has been adequately instructed, or those treasures of thought, feeling, and impulse which accumulate in the high ranges of spiritual reception and expression? It is a short-sighted vision which plans only for the triumphs which the skill and strength of man can gain over matter. It is a mean ambition that is contented with the accumulation of material fortune. Try as much as you please, you cannot lift the mercenary motive to the level of dignity and applause. Men do not applaud it. There is too much of the divinity of correct judgment in them to pronounce mercenary results, however large, worthy of man or an ornament to society.

(2) Nor is wisdom pleasure. This is not to say that happiness may never be hoped for, or enjoyed when it comes. If we did not desire to be happy, we should be more than human—or less. But the only way of obtaining happiness is to renounce altogether the pursuit of it. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things'—things which go to make life happy—'shall be added unto you.'

¶ 'Happiness,' says Aristotle, 'is the bloom that lies upon a life of goodness.'

¶ 'Nothing,' says St Chrysostom, 'makes men light-hearted like deliverance from care

and anxiety, especially when they may be delivered therefrom without suffering any disadvantage, forasmuch as God is with them and stands them in lieu of all.'

2. But if the true end is to be reached there must be *a right starting-point.* Everything depends on the start in the religious life. It is said, 'All is well that ends well.' That is a lie. The penitent thief ended well, but that did not undo the mischief of his life. It did not restore the stolen goods, or banish the misery from the broken-hearted mothers of those he had slain. It does not do to begin at the wrong end. 'Well begun is half done.' That is true. The old rhyme says of the day, 'Between six and eight, you have sealed its fate.' You have made your day between six and eight. Sailors can see by the sunrise what the character of the day is to be. If you get a good sunrise, you will get a good day. And you can make your own sunrise in religion.

¶ The quaint Fuller tells us of a Sybil offering to sell to a king of Rome three volumes of her oracles, but he refused to buy because of the high price. She took them away and burned one volume, and afterwards returned to sell the two remaining at the price of three. He refused again, thinking her little better than mad: thereupon she burned the second volume, and demanded the same price for the remaining one that she had asked for the three. Otherwise she would burn that also, and he would dearly repent it. The king, thinking it must be of great value and admiring her resolution, bought it. There are three volumes of men's time: Youth, Manhood, and Old Age; and ministers advise them to redeem this time. But men think the price too much, because it will cost them the renouncing of carnal delights. Whereupon one-third part of their life (youth) is consumed. The same renunciation, or price, is asked for manhood, but refused; so of old age, the last volume, and the same price; but the aged will find it harder and dearer, because of fixed habits, than if they had bought all three at the beginning.

¶ There is a very striking utterance of Coleridge, in which he says that 'There is no chance of truth as the goal where there is not a childlike humility at the starting-point.' I suppose that Carlyle would substitute the word 'reverence' in place of the word 'humility.' The Bible uses neither word, but employs the mighty phrase, 'the fear of the Lord.' It is here that we are to find 'the beginning of wisdom.' When a man wishes to make a sacred and worthy use of time he must lay aside all flippancy and insincerity, and move in the spirit of holy reverence and fear.[1]

3. There must also be serious *determination to make progress.* A man who wants to employ every moment in dignified purpose must be continually questioning the moral significance of things. He must not allow things to 'take their chance.' He must assert an imperative discrimination over everything that comes to his door. He must not pay final homage to established custom. There are some customs which he must break if he would preserve his own integrity. Neither must he allow his feelings to decide his destiny. It is not what he likes that must be the arbiter, but what is morally true. He must bring everything to the bar of moral judgment. He must cross-examine everything. 'Where are you going? What is your main trend? Are you a regular liner or only a buccaneer on the high seas?' Every moment we are solicited by objects that ask our sympathy and service. We must not take them at their own valuation. We must 'prove all things.'

4. Again, there must be *a dynamic.* If we are to set about in quest of a noble and transfigured character, to press on 'toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ' we need an adequate inspiration. And here it is: 'I can do all things in Christ strengthening me.' And here it is again: it is possible for me to apprehend that 'for which also I have been apprehended of Christ.' 'Thou, O Christ, art all I want.' If we will consecrate our judgments and our wills, and use the common sense which is the Lord's finest gift next to His own grace, He will bestow upon us the powers of the Spirit, and we shall find that the impossible is our destined inheritance.

¶ The dynamic is the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is the conviction that God loves us, and loves us with all the love He has got. If I had to make God love me I should give up in despair, for I should never be loved. Said one of my little ones to the youngest, in that

[1] J. H. Jowett.

threatening tone which is usually adopted in teaching, 'You must be good, you know, or father won't love you.' Then I called him to myself, and said, gravely and tenderly, 'Do you know what you have said? It is not true, my boy, not a bit true. I can't help loving you because I am your father, you know. But when you are good I love you with a love that makes me glad, and when you are not good I love you with a love that hurts.' God's love is not conditioned. Nothing we can ever do, nothing we can ever feel or believe, will make God love us more than He does.[1]

5. And, finally, there must be *some method*. The great majority of people are convinced that they have little or no time for anything. One of the commonest wastes of time is that which consists in frequently saying that we have no time at all. It is a commonplace that it is the busiest man who is always readiest to do a little more. In the simple matter of packing a bag it is amazing how soon the inexpert packer seems to be at the end of his resources. But the expert packer of a bag always has room for another article. And so it is in the daily life. Methodical men, with purpose and method, can always find a corner for a good thing. Morley's *Life of Gladstone* revealed to us how marvellous were the harvestings which that great man made in the mere corners of his fields.

¶ Scott had no 'unconsidered trifles' of time. Every moment was turned to account; and thus he had leisure for everything.[2]

¶ In order to do the most we are capable of, the first rule is that every day should see its own work done. Let the task for each day be resolved and arranged for deliberately the night before, and let nothing interfere with its performance. It is a secret which we learn slowly—the secret of living by days. I am convinced that there are very few so precious. What confuses work, what mars life and makes it feverish, is the postponing of the task which ought to be done now. The word which John Ruskin had on his seal was 'To-day.'[3]

[1] Mark Guy Pearse.
[2] J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, viii. 62.
[3] W. Robertson Nicoll.

The Increasing Purpose

Ps. xc. 16.—'Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.'

THE suggestion of the text is that one purpose binds all the ages together. 'Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.' One generation disappears like the falling leaves of the autumn, another immediately succeeds like the leaves of the spring. But, says the Psalmist, these successive generations are not so many isolated crowds vanishing in the dust; they constitute one army of the living God, they are intimately related one to another, one purpose runs through the ages binding the generations into an unbroken series. The Psalmist takes a large view, recognizing not only his contemporaries, but those who came before and those who follow after. There is a remarkable type of disease known as agoraphobia; it manifests itself in a fear of open space, which is the literal meaning of the term. Intellectually this malady is common. Many of us are incapable of taking large views, we have little aptitude for magnificent distances, all our vision and thought are narrowly bounded. Prophets and Psalmists show no sign of this infirmity. They habitually indulge in vast outlooks. This Psalm is an illustration. The seer looking before and after beholds a thousand affiliated generations effectuating the one grand purpose of the Creator and Ruler of the universe.

1. *The nature of the Divine purpose that runs through the ages.*—That purpose is obscure enough outside revelation, the light of Nature does not reveal to what goal she tends, but it is fully manifest in revelation. 'Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory upon their children.' The object of the Divine government is mankind, and its glory is revealed in the fact that it designs the redemption of mankind. The material universe is not the supreme medium for the revelation of the Divine glory; neither is it His supreme concern. John Burroughs, the naturalist, expressed a fear 'lest science should become so absorbed with its great problems that it should forget Man.' Therefore this writer contends that the poet is continually needed to endow science with fresh human interest. Grand as the world

is, man must be on the top. Now revelation is never at fault here. It does full justice to the magnitude, magnificence, and mystery of the creation, but man and his fortunes are always in the front. Despite our frailties, sins, sorrows, mortality, we are yet the special objects of the Divine thought, compassion, and care.

And what is the exact nature of the Divine purpose in Christ Jesus? Is it not our redemption from the guilt and power of sin? 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' Is it not our perfection? Christ Jesus by His truth and grace aims to bring us fully into the liberty of the sons of God. He designs to realize all the grand possibilities of the human soul. Once more He appeals to His Father, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Is it not our eternal happiness? In the Cross of Christ humanity finds power to realize every aspiration, the promise of everlasting life, and the Cross is the pole-star by which from all eternity God has steered the universe. And let us not forget that this fulness of blessing in Christ Jesus is for the race. 'God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' To this end the sun shines, the seasons revolve, the rivers flow, the earth abides. By many activities we may indirectly further the purpose of God, but in our missionary work we are immediate co-workers with Him. We have entered into the very secret of the Lord.

2. *The saving purpose of God is an ever unfolding purpose.*—A recent philosopher propounds as a vital doctrine what he calls The Everlasting Return of all Things. Whatever exists in the present is the repetition of what has existed in the past, and what exists now will eternally recur. There is everlasting identity and repetition of experience and circumstance. This is not the general view of thinkers, as it is certainly not that of revelation. Society does not move in a cycle, as Nature moves in a circle of identical revolutions, but the purpose of the Supreme becomes clearer with each succeeding age. As a matter of fact, God's purpose in Christ to save all nations becomes ever clearer, ever nearer. Some time ago a distinguished author published a work entitled, *The Wonderful Century*. It contains a sketch of the most prominent examples of material and intellectual progress during the nineteenth century. It is a marvellous record of brilliant discovery and progress alike in science, art, and industry. In the author's opinion the full importance and grandeur of the century is such that it must be compared not with any single preceding century, but with the whole historical period. Yet we venture to affirm that the past century has been still more wonderful in its missionary achievements. We have successfully invaded vast empires. One missionary writes, 'In the short space of a little over a hundred years Christianity has reached a position in China that it took three hundred years to reach in the Roman Empire after the time of Christ.' In India, Burma, Japan, Formosa, Korea, and many other lands, are millions of Christians. Instead of a few solitary pioneers, we count our agents by the thousand. Sporadic efforts of evangelization are reduced to a science. A vast missionary literature has been created. Native churches arise and flourish. And what in some senses is yet more significant, the missionary idea has so grown upon the conscience and heart of the home Church that that Church has itself become a missionary society, after the ideal of the primitive Church. The Kingdom of Christ suffers many vicissitudes, it is familiar with arrestments, obscurations, reversions, humiliations; yet it lives, it grows, it wins its widening way!

¶ When they kindle the festival lamps round the dome of St Peter's at Rome, there is first a twinkling spot here and there, and gradually they multiply till they outline the whole in an unbroken ring of light.

¶ Dr Arthur Neave, of the Medical Mission, writes in his book, *Thirty Years in Kashmir*, 'My firm conviction is that Islam can do no more for these races than it has done; they have reached the moral standard of the founder of their creed. But no man is the man he might be who does not consciously frame himself on the example of Jesus Christ.' And then, having given this testimony to the influence of Christianity on personal character, he proceeds to speak of its influence on national life, and adds, 'In common with many advanced thinkers among Indians, as well as most mission leaders, I believe that the fusing of all the Indian races and castes into one great nation can only take place under the influence and inspiration of Christianity.'

3. *We are co-workers with God in the accomplishment of His saving purpose.*—This Psalm begins with disclosing the majesty of God, it ends by recognizing the majesty of man. The grandeur of the eternal God is best seen in the redeeming work of the eternal Son; and the greatness of man is best seen in the fact that he is worthy of redemption, and worthy to become the agent for carrying out the sublime scheme. 'Let thy work appear unto thy servants.' 'And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.' How closely we are associated with the Divine! Here we awake to the knowledge of our greatness. The poet has pictured us as swept away by a flood, as flowers trampled in the dust ere they have bloomed, our days as a watch in the night, our life a sigh, yet at last he stumbles on our divinity. Our greatness comes to light as we identify ourselves with a scheme of universal love and service, a scheme which is the glory of God. And here, too, we awake to the sense of our immortality.

¶ Speaking of a jetty which changed the direction of the tides, Victor Hugo remarks, 'And yet the tide is eternal. But eternity obeys man more than man imagines.'

The eternal is underneath all this frailty of ours. The humblest of us can do a work that will last a century, a millennium, an eternity. Here is our opportunity, our glory, our blessedness, to identify ourselves with the saving work of God.

The Beauty of the Lord

Ps. xc. 17.—'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.'

The phrase, 'the beauty of God,' may strike us as just a little inappropriate and incongruous. We do not often apostrophize God as Augustine did—'O beauty, so old and yet so new, too late I loved Thee.' And yet it must be true that God is beautiful. He is indeed the supreme and absolute beauty. The old Greeks put into their statues and representations of their gods their highest conceptions of human beauty; into their Aphrodite, all they knew of womanly charm; into their Apollo, all they knew of manly grace; into their Zeus, all they knew of royal majesty and dignity. The instinct that made them thus identify the Divine with the beautiful was altogether right. It was only the mode of expression that was wrong. It was *physical* beauty they attributed to their deities, and they did this because their conception of deity was material and anthropomorphic. But God is a Spirit, and the beauty that characterizes Him is moral and spiritual beauty.

¶ Charles Kingsley was overheard in his last illness murmuring quietly to himself, 'How beautiful God is! How beautiful God is!'

¶ We are all familiar, if not with the original, at least with the fine engravings and copies of the Madonna Seggiola, undoubtedly the greatest work of human art. The transcendent beauty of this picture is in its spiritual and moral significance; in the prophetic cast of the Redeemer's face; in the evident consciousness in the mother's countenance of the divineness of her calling as the most blessed among women; in the rapt adoration glowing in the human form of the child; in the cherub faces beneath, and in the cloud of worshipping angels which forms the background. These faces, these forms, are beautiful because of the spirit that is in them; because of their profound meaning, their holiness, purity, love, and worship.[1]

> Not colour, line or harmonies
> Alone can make the perfect whole—
> Beauty supreme is more than these,
> It is the flowering of the soul.[2]

From this point of view—that is, from the standpoint of beauty of character—how beautiful God is! We could guess as much from glancing at His works. Take the glory of the spring-tide. The earth in spring-time fills any one who has any sense of beauty with a perfect exhilaration of delight.

But though 'Nature,' as our hymn puts it—

> With open volume stands
> To spread her Maker's praise abroad;
> And every labour of His hands
> Shows something worthy of a God,

it is not in Nature that we find the highest revelation of the 'beauty of the Lord.' For

[1] A. P. Peabody. [2] Dorothy F. Gurney.

that we turn to the gospel. The heavens declare the glory of God—yes, but His Holy Word declares it more plainly still. And it is declared most plainly of all in the Incarnate Word—in Jesus Christ.

1. Beauty is not a single quality or characteristic, it is the result of a combination of qualities and characteristics. It is like the ray of light. The ray is really not single, though it seems such. It is a combination of violet and orange and green and blue that produces the purity and beauty of the white ray. And moral and spiritual beauty is also a complex thing. It is never the result of one quality, but always of a combination of qualities. We can see some of the necessary constituents of moral and spiritual beauty in most men's characters. But no human life ever lived on this earth has ever created the impression of perfect beauty. Some element is always lacking. The only perfect and flawless beauty is the 'beauty of the Lord.'

'The fairest of ten thousand,' He,
Proportion all and harmony;
All mortal beauty's but a ray
Of His bright ever-shining day;
A little, feeble, twinkling star,
Which, now the Sun's in place, must disappear:—
There is but One that's good, there is but One that's fair.[1]

What, then, are the elements that go to make up the Divine beauty? We cannot mention all of them, for every good we know of is in God. But there are two qualities—contrasted qualities almost—which, blended together, go far towards creating the impression of the ineffable beauty of God. They are God's holiness and God's grace.

(1) *God's Holiness.* There can be no moral beauty without holiness. When a man's life is smudged and stained with sin, the beauty of his character is wholly gone. Now the Bible is full of an awe-stricken sense of the holiness of God. 'The Lord our God is holy'—it was the first truth about the character of God that the Israelites were taught. The contents of the Law and the awe-inspiring circumstances that accompanied the giving of it were all meant to grave upon their hearts this truth. And this quality of holiness is a permanent element in the beauty of the Lord. In Jesus Christ He revealed Himself as the Holy One. Perhaps in these days we are tempted to overlook, if not to ignore, this element in the Divine beauty and glory. But there would be no beauty in God, He would indeed cease to be God, if He were not holy. The most striking feature in Swiss scenery is the vision of its mighty mountain peaks clothed ever in their mantles of snowy white. Take the snow mountains away, and you have destroyed the beauty of Switzerland. And in much the same way you destroy the 'beauty of the Lord' if you forget His holiness.

(2) *God's Grace.* Holiness is the basal element in moral beauty, but holiness of itself would not produce the impression of beauty. For the word 'beauty' carries with it the suggestion of *charm.* Indeed, it might be more correctly translated 'pleasantness.' It is winsome and attractive beauty. It is not something that commands our admiration simply, it is something that constrains our love. Holiness alone would scarcely constrain love. It is too high and majestic and austere; it does not charm and win us; it awes us, it subdues us—one might almost say it terrifies us. 'Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips,' is the heart-broken cry of the prince of the prophets. 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,' is the bitter cry of the chief of the apostles. It was a cry wrung from him by a vision of the holiness of God. There is something more than holiness needed to create the beauty that wins and charms and attracts. And that something more we find in God's *grace.*

That was what struck the disciples most about the character of Jesus. 'We beheld his glory,' says John; 'glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace.' It was this characteristic of Jesus that gave Him His charm. 'The common people heard him gladly.' It was His love that drew them. When righteousness is blended with love to produce goodness, then men's hearts are won to such enthusiastic devotion that they will even dare to die. God is more than infinite holiness; He is the loving God who gave His Son to die. And that constitutes the beauty, the pleasantness, of the Lord; in Him mercy

[1] Francis Quarles.

and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

2. Turn now to the prayer that the Psalmist utters in the text—'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.' He prays that the Divine beauty and glory may become the possession of all God's people. This is a daring prayer. Is it a possible one? Surely it is. It was one of the best-beloved of our modern mystics who said in his own quaint way, 'The Christian ought always to be good-looking.' Beneath the quaint phrase there lies a great and blessed truth. The Christian ought to share in the perfect beauty of God. The Apostle tells us that all who steadfastly gaze upon the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory. And the Apostle's statement is confirmed and ratified by the facts of experience. Men have been so changed and transformed.

¶ An ancient Indian poem tells us that the tree of life, usually gnarled and bare, yet bears at times on its branches two exquisite kinds of fruit—poetry, and love or the society of beautiful souls. Such men and women there are, our loveliest and best, evident citizens of a Kingdom of Heaven, for the mark of the Lord of that Kingdom is clear for all the world to see in the spiritual loveliness which is the outshining of their character.[1]

'I have seen God in you,' a famous novelist makes one of her characters say of another. The New Testament quite clearly contemplates our sharing in the beauty of holiness, for St Peter says, 'Like as he which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living, because it is written, Ye shall be holy, for I am holy'; and in the beauty of love, for St Paul says, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,' and the 'mind which was in Christ Jesus' was, as the Apostle proceeds to show, the gracious, unselfish, loving and self-sacrificing mind illustrated in the Cross.

3. In the last place, notice the effect of the Divine beauty upon the world. There is no such apologetic for Christianity as a beautiful Christian life. A holy and loving character is the most potent and effective of all sermons. Perhaps that is why Christianity has made such slow progress—there has been in us so little holiness, so little love. The world is so indifferent to the charm of Christianity because it has seen so little of it. But whenever people see Christian folk with some of the beauty of the Lord upon them they are subdued and won.

¶ 'In our family,' Gibbon tells us in his *Memoirs*, 'in our family William Law left the reputation of a worthy and pious man who believed all that he professed, and practised all that he enjoined.' And he was often heard to say that the beautiful character of William Law had done more to make Christianity credible to him than all the volumes of polemics and apologetics over which it had been his duty to pore.[1]

A significant sentence follows this one of the text: 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it.' That is a striking sequence—first the Christian character, then the success of our labours. We cannot have the second without the first. 'If those who call themselves Christians only lived the Christian life,' said Charles Kingsley, 'the world would be converted to God in a day.' We long to see our work established; we long to see Church and school crowned with success; we long to see the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. But there is a prior prayer we need to offer. The secret of the slow progress is in ourselves. Let us ask God to do His work first upon us—to purge us of our littlenesses and selfishnesses and sins.

[1] R. Glaister, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 15.

Personal Religion

Ps. xci. 1.—'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.'

It has been suggested that this Psalm was addressed to the nation of Israel at a crisis in its history. Psalm xc., it is said, is the plea of Israel in exile, and Psalm xcii., its thanksgiving for deliverance from captivity. Psalm xci. is held to come between the two chronologically, and to reflect the troublous events which led to the Persian conquest of Babylon and the consequent deliverance of Israel. The Psalm is an assurance that Israel will be safe

[1] F. W. Boreham, *A Temple of Topaz*, 11.

amid all the calamities which will overtake the beleaguered city.

Whether this is the true explanation of the origin of the Psalm or not, it is certain that Christians have always applied it to their own personal religious life. It was the favourite Psalm of General Gordon, and it is one of those to which the majority of us would turn most readily in times of difficulty and trouble. The theme of the Psalm is *the security afforded by personal religion*. We never know what the future has in store for us. Doubtless we shall all have our share of perils and difficulties and perplexities, but they cannot harm our souls if we know the deepest meaning of religion.

1. *The Psalmist's Definition of Personal Religion.*—It is to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Here we are dealing not with creeds or forms or ritual, which divide men, but with an inner experience which unites those who are poles asunder in religious belief. And there is no genuine manifestation of the religious spirit which is not covered by the Psalmist's definition.

The reference to 'the secret place' suggests the idea of the Most Holy Place in the Temple. Solomon's Temple, memories of which were tenderly cherished by the Jews in exile, consisted of an outer courtyard, a porch facing east, a central hall, and an inner sanctuary. And in God's invisible Temple is there not a somewhat similar arrangement? In the outer courtyard are vast multitudes of all kindreds and tribes and tongues, who worship God under many forms and call Him by many names, but who know little of religion as a vitalizing and transforming power within the soul. And some there are who have passed into the central sanctuary. They are the great body of Christ's disciples. Religion is to them a reality; they have experienced God's power in their lives, and have surrendered to His constraining love. And yet their practice of the presence of God is not constant and unbroken. It is only the elect souls who dwell continually in the inner sanctuary, the secret place, where the vision never grows dim, where fellowship with God is never clouded, and where the soul is filled with peace and with joy.

To describe the spiritual we cannot avoid the use of analogies drawn from the physical. The secret places of life are not geographical points, but spiritual experiences. We stand in God's acre by the grave of our loved ones, and we are in a secret place. How can that be, when we are exposed to the gaze of the curious passer-by? But we are not in the cemetery. We have used a key which we alone possess, and have entered an inner chamber of memory and love, and are living again the tender experiences of the past. Crowds may pass along the path at our side, but we are still in the secret place. The secret place is not even that sacred plot of ground where our loved ones sleep, but fellowship in memory with loving and kindred souls.

You may go to the performance of a great oratorio and watch the audience. There is one man who has a thorough knowledge of music and is following the score closely, noting every point in the execution carefully. The music gives him a pleasant thrill, but it opens no doors. Next to him is a man who is so enthralled and lifted out of himself that he has let his copy of the music fall to the floor, and he is oblivious of all his surroundings. The windows of heaven have been opened, and his soul is gazing into new worlds. That man has penetrated to the secret place. The two sit side by side, but one is in the secret place, and the other in the outer court.

¶ There is a story told of a man who took a pedantic friend to hear Phillips Brooks, the great American preacher. When they came out of church at the conclusion of the service he turned to the pedant and said, 'Haven't we had an inspiring sermon?' And the answer he got was, 'Well, he made one grammatical error!'

The secret place in God's universal temple is neither the sanctuary where we worship, nor the quiet room in our house in which we are wont to pray. It is our experience of God, our vision of Him, and our fellowship with Him. It is that spot where our spirit meets the Spirit of the Infinite—the spot 'where spirits blend, and friend holds fellowship with friend.' That is the meaning of personal religion—to enter the secret place and live in abiding fellowship with God. The Psalmist does not speak of occasional visits to the secret place, but of dwelling there; and to abide requires the consent of the will. What he has in mind is constant fellowship. We are to live in communion with God all the day through, without neglecting

any of life's common duties. It is difficult, but not as hard as we sometimes allow ourselves to believe. We have heard of poets and philosophers who have lived in attics in mean streets, but they have not *dwelt* there. In spirit they have dwelt in secret places, holding fellowship with the noble and the wise of every age. So we must live in the world, doing our duty, facing our responsibilities, carrying our burdens, fighting our temptations, and yet all the while we must be gathering strength and inspiration beneath the shadow of the Almighty.

¶ Mark Rutherford tells us in one of his books how he worked for long hours every day in an underground office, under a bullying overseer, and with foul-minded and foul-mouthed companions, and how he was sustained through it all by the thought of the love that awaited him at home. You will say at first that he spent his day at the office, but if you think longer you will say that even while in the office he dwelt at home, and for that reason was able to face the tasks and carry the burdens of the day.

There is a secret place of rest
God's saints alone may know,
Thou shall not find it East nor West
Though seeking to and fro.

A cell where Jesus is the door,
His love the only key,
Who enter will go out no more,
But there with Jesus be.

2. *The Security afforded by Personal Religion.* —What is the value of personal religion for the practical life? The Psalmist's answer is that it gives us security. We abide under the shadow of the Almighty—under the shadow of omnipotence, which does not mean that those who live in fellowship with God are immune from trouble and adversity. Tribulation and anguish are part of the mysterious economy of life, and fall with a baffling and bewildering impartiality upon good and evil alike. But the sublime truth that the Psalmist has grasped is this, that whatever troubles may overtake us, if we dwell in the secret place of the Most High our souls shall abide secure, inviolate, and uncontaminated.

¶ On the 11th March, 1884, General Gordon wrote thus to his sister: 'Remember, our Lord did not promise success or peace in this life. He promised tribulation, so if things do not go well after the flesh, he still is faithful. He will do all in love and mercy to me. My part is to submit to his will, however dark it may be.'

¶ The old Celtic saints, Ninian, Columba, and the rest, were accustomed to fix their cells among the rocks, on the very margin of the waves; and there they meditated on the Word of God, and knelt in prayer, and sang aloud their psalms. Often the tide flowed to their feet. Often the white spray clung to their hair. It is a parable of how a true Christian lives, with the mighty billows rolling restlessly beside him and sometimes dashing themselves over him, but with confidence in his heart and praise on his lips.[1]

The assaults of temptation will be vain. 'The terror by night, the arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, the destruction that wasteth at noonday'—an appalling catalogue of foes! They are not peculiar to any one life; they haunt the precincts of all lives. They pervade all the changing hours and moods of the varied day. Every change in the day's march reveals a special and characteristic foe. But neither the subtle and secret temptations of darkness nor the temptations that assault us openly can harm us. So long as we dwell in the secret place we are clothed with a shield and a buckler which no arrow can penetrate. We are beset by the protective power of God. Do we realize what this means? Pain may hurt our bodies, but it can never hurt our souls. Adversity may impoverish our business, but it cannot impoverish our souls. Evil sights may stain our eyes, and evil thoughts, entering unbidden, may soil our minds, but they cannot pollute our souls.

We shall not content ourselves with defence, but shall take the aggressive. 'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under feet.' You cannot spend your life under the shadow of the hills without partaking of the strength of the hills. And you cannot live day by day in the secret place, under the shadow of the Almighty, without partaking of the strength of omnipotence. The Christian life demands action as well as prayer and quiet trust in God. Sometimes courageous aggression is the only

[1] A. Smellie, *Sunset Glory*, 11.

possible method of defence. To stand still and await the attack is to invite defeat. Do not let us passively await the onslaughts of temptation, relying on God to repel them. We know our own hearts and our own perils. We know the enemies that must be subdued if we are to be the captains of our own souls. Up and attack! We may be weak and feeble, but we are overshadowed by omnipotence, and underneath are the everlasting arms. 'Greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.'

The Divine companionship will be ours through every vicissitude. 'I will be with him in trouble.' What vicissitude can harm or crush the soul if we have the fellowship of the Divine Companion? The true philosophy of life is not to seek for rosy paths, and to pray that we may be exempt from all life's discipline, but to dwell in the secret place, and then to await with a quiet confidence whatever life has in store for us. Dwelling there, we are more than sufficient for whatever awaits us. We are victors over circumstance, and masters of our souls, for we dwell in living fellowship with Him who makes of circumstances the creatures of His will. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.'

Dangerous Years

Ps. xci. 6.—'The destruction that wasteth at noonday.'

Time is indeed a terrible tester of men, and 'he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.' There are those who imagine that by mid-life, when the storm and stress of youth are over, the danger line has been passed, and that a man runs little risk of being swept away. Not so. This false security has been a cause of many a failure. No period of life is proof against peril, but the most dangerous years are the two decades between forty and sixty.

1. There are many reasons why this is so. For one thing the native idealism of youth has begun to fade into the light of common day. Whether by choice or by necessity, by mid-life a man has found his work in the world, and has settled down to his task. With this settlement into a single task there generally comes a certain happiness. Unless a man's work be so uncongenial as to be abhorrent there is a quiet pleasure in those very limits that are the noticeable marks of middle age. There is an ingathering of strength as well—the strength that always comes of concentration. But just here arises one danger of that period. It lies in the contraction of the manhood to the one groove in which the life-work runs. The eager expectancy of youth is gone. The range of opening manhood is no more. Absorbed in the business on which his living hangs, a man contracts into a business-man—settles down into a narrow rut and becomes a mere physician, a mere farmer, a mere scientist. There was a day when he felt the charm of Nature, but the voices of Nature mean little to him now. There was a day when poetry could move him, but that day is gone. Quietly happy because he has found his groove, he may be further from God than a wayward youth.

Faced by that peril as we are, how may we reasonably hope to overcome it? One way is to have some lively interest out of the single line of the career. It may be books, it may be pictures; it may be politics, it may be music. It does not really matter what it is, if it be an avenue into a larger world. If it be only a hobby of collecting beetles, it tends to keep a man from being a mere machine, and helps him through the perils of the noonday. But there is something better than a hobby. It is the symmetry of the character of Jesus. It is the thought that there once moved on earth a Man who was perfect in the whole range of manhood. That is the value of fellowship with Christ in an age when specialism is inevitable. That is the value of fellowship with Christ in a city where men are bound to concentrate.

2. Another peril of the noonday is the decay of faith in God. There is no period in the whole course of life in which it is so hard to walk by faith. In childhood, faith is an abiding habit. Dependent for everything upon the care of others, to lean on others is a sheer necessity. And so in youth is found the trustful habit, that happy reliance upon another's love, which makes the child, no matter what his faults, the type of the citizen in Jesus' Kingdom. Then in old age, and when the sun is westering, faith surely must become easier again. Standing so

near the margin of this world, has a man no gleams and visions of the next? Faith may never be easy. It is the greatest of ventures and of victories, and not to be won without a battle. But in middle age these helps and encouragements are wholly wanting. There is neither the stimulus of youth nor of age to lead a man to trust in the unseen. We are self-dependent now, and self-reliant; it is by the toil of our own hand we live. Once we depended upon another's labour, but now our livelihood hangs upon our own. Then, too, in the time of middle age there is generally a reasonable measure of good health. The days succeed each other at an even pace, and before us lies an unbroken stretch of road. No period is so prone to materialize the spirit, or to blind a man to the range of the unseen. Then first relying on our personal effort, and through our effort achieving some success; then first awakening to the power of money, and to all that money is able to procure; still unvisited by signs of dissolution, and reasonably secure of many years, it is in middle age we run the tremendous peril of becoming worldly and materialized. Listen to a company of middle-aged men talk and is it not certain to come round to money, to their losses and to their successes and their incomes? What they say is not scandal, nor would we even suggest it is uncharitable. We only say that there is no time when it is harder to walk with God than on the levels of our middle age; none when it is more difficult to keep alive the vision of the eternal and unseen. The large relationships of things are eclipsed. Our eyes are lured from life's ultimate goals, the things of sense hem us round about, and we become the prisoners of the immediate hour.

¶ In a pretty little poem, Francis Browne pictures a band of pilgrims sitting by the sea recounting their past adventures. They tell the tale of their losses. One speaks of a tiny grass-grown grave; one of a fortune made and lost; one of a ship that never came to port; and one of a beautiful but buried bride.

But when their tales were done,
There spake among them one,
A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free:
'Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet,
For a believing heart hath gone from me.'
'Alas!' these pilgrims said,
'For the living and the dead,
For fortune's cruelty, and love's sore cross,
For the wrecks of land and sea;
But howe'er it came to thee,
Thine, stranger, is life's last and heaviest loss!'[1]

3. Not only is middle age the time when we are in peril of losing faith in God. It is also very notably the time when we are in danger of losing faith in man. The two things indeed may be said to go together, the one making way for and drawing on the other, for between faith in man and faith in God there is ever the most vital of connections. In our days of youth we believe in men with a splendid trust. We have not yet come into contact with them, nor learned the common motives that inspire them. It is from our father we take our ideas of manhood; it is from our mother we take our ideas of womanhood; and the father is ever a hero to the child, and the mother is ever worthy to be loved. Then we begin to read, and in our books we find the story of great and noble actions; nor do we think of these as something rare, on the contrary we father them on every man we meet. And then again, as the poet Wordsworth taught us, we clothe man in the charm of his surroundings, giving to every shepherd on the hills something of the strength of the hills on which he moves. So do we stand on the threshold of maturity, believing in manhood with a perfect trust, yet with a trust which never has been tried. And then with middle age comes the awaking. We see how different men are from our dreams. The vision we had of them is rudely shattered, and with the shattering there goes our faith.

¶ H. G. Wells has a powerful story of a man who is left alone in a room in a house reputed to be haunted. The terror of the story is furnished by the effect on the man's mind of a row of candles slowly going out one by one. That is a picture of what happens in the lives of a large number of people. One by one the lights in which they have trusted go out. And the room is dark.[2]

It may be that a young man goes to business under an employer who is a professing Christian.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Other Side of the Hill*, 127.
[2] H. E. Luccock, *Preaching Values*, 309.

But he discovers in the business shady tricks, practices incompatible with honour, wheels within wheels, and the mean hunting after place and power that flaunts itself as patriotic politics. Or it may be he comes into contact with one whom he had been led to respect and finds that his moral standards are very different from what he believed. Passion has flared up in an unguarded moment and left a fair name a heap of ruins. Or it may be we meet what George Adam Smith calls *the atheism of force.* And so life loses its ideals, its dignities, its elevations. It has push, but no worship except the strength of self.

Every man who is the least in earnest has to pass through disenchantment in some form. Very commonly it meets a man as youth expires and middle age begins. And it is this passage from the hopes of youth to the chilling experience of middle life that is so often attended by an eclipse of faith. Some men it makes utterly hard-hearted; others it makes tolerantly cynical. To some it is a positive relief to find the world no better than themselves. But to all it is a deadly peril, far more insidious than sins of youth—it is the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

There is but one help in that temptation—one help, yet it is all-sufficient. It is to remember that though He knew the worst, Christ never for an hour lost faith in man. Despised, deceived, rejected, and betrayed, still in the eyes of Christ was manhood noble. Great is our need of Christ in time of youth, if we are to steer our barque amid its shoals. Great is our need of Christ when we are old, if we hope to enter the eternal city. But not less great is our need of Jesus Christ in the dusty levels of our middle age, if we are to be saved from that destroying angel—the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

The Keeping Angels

Ps. xci. 11.—'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.'

1. The Jew peopled his universe with angels. These angels were all ministering spirits; they were the bearers of God's gifts to men, and hovered unseen round and about them ready to help and succour and save. The angel of the Lord, the Jew believed, was always encamped round about God's people for their deliverance and security. And so the Psalmist who wrote the ninety-first Psalm, reproducing the popular belief, pictures a man walking unharmed and unhurt in spite of the terror by night and the pestilence that walketh in darkness, in spite of the arrow that flieth by day and the destruction that wasteth at noonday, because God had given His angels charge over him to keep him in all his ways.

The materialistic temper of this age leaves no room for the angel. We no longer watch for the flash of his glory or listen for the rustling of his wings. But even if we have lost faith in the literal angel, the Psalmist's word still remains essentially true. Even though we never catch a vision of the angel face, nor hear the beating of the angel wings, yet God's 'messengers' (for that is exactly what 'angel' means) are ever about us, delivering us from harm, rescuing us from peril, keeping us in all our ways. For God's messengers come to us in familiar form and everyday guise. So common and everyday, in fact, that, like Manoah, we do not recognize them as angels until they have gone away from us. For a friend can be God's angel, and a memory can be God's angel, and a book can be God's angel, and an experience can be God's angel. And by such things as these, amid the perils and temptations of which life is full, He guides us and directs us and keeps us in all our ways.

¶ I think that visions of angels are granted to-day to those who have the eyes to see them just as they were in Old Testament times; but I don't believe that angels appear as you would expect them to, Matilda—all got up in harps and crowns and flaming swords. I believe that when they come nowadays they look so commonplace and, as you might call, ordinary looking, that only those folks that have the eye of faith can perceive them at all. They can see them all right, mind you! But they can't recognize them as the angels of God.[1]

In the old days God sent His angels oft
To men in threshing floors, to women pressed
With daily tasks; they came to tent and croft
And whispered words of blessing and of rest.

[1] Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler.

Not mine to guess what shape those angels were,
Nor tell what voice they spoke, nor with what grace
They brought the dear love down that evermore
Makes lowliest souls its best abiding place.
But in these days I know my angels well,
They brush my garments on the common way,
They take my hand and very softly tell
Some bit of comfort in the waning day. . . .
They are God-given to this world of men,
God-sent to bless it in its hours of need—
Child, mother, dearest wife, brave hearts that take
The rough and bitter cross and help us bear
Its heavy weight when strength is like to break—
God bless you each, our angels unaware.

2. What the special perils were which the Psalmist describes as the 'terror by night,' 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' 'the arrow that flieth by day,' 'the destruction that wasteth at noonday' it is impossible precisely to tell. Probably they were physical perils and both day and night teemed with them. But whatever may have been the original reference, when we read the Psalm we do not think chiefly of physical dangers, we think rather of spiritual perils. 'Night' and 'day' to us are not merely chronological terms, they are moral terms. 'Night' means more than the intervals of time between sunset and sunrise, it stands also for a state of the soul. 'And it was night,' we read in the story of our Lord's betrayal. That means much more than that darkness had fallen; it means that it was 'night' in our Lord's experience, that woe and homelessness and dread had overwhelmed His soul. And 'day' is also a moral term. If 'night' stands for gloom and depression and despair, 'day' stands for brightness and prosperity and success. Both adversity and prosperity have their dangers. We speak of the persons upon whom griefs and disappointments beat down, as being 'sorely tried.' But we miss the entire point of the Bible teaching if we do not recognize that the man whose way is prosperous, and whose life is sunny, is a more fiercely-tried man still.

(1) The 'night' has its terror! Trials, troubles, disappointments often breed doubt and despair. But God has always His angel ready to 'keep' men when their way leads them through the night. It is with them as it was with Christian when he passed through the terrible valley of the shadow of death. Christian was hard put to it; what between the narrowness of the path and the noises of the fiends he was on the point of turning back. 'But when he had travelled in this disconsolate condition some considerable time,' says John Bunyan, 'he thought he heard the voice of a man, as going before him, saying, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear none ill, for thou art with me." Then was he glad, and that for these reasons—(1) Because he gathered from thence that some who feared God were in this valley as well as himself; (2) For that he perceived that God was with them, though in that dark and dismal state, and why not, he thought, with me? (3) For that he hoped, could he overtake them, to have company by-and-by. And by-and-by day broke; then said Christian, "He hath turned the shadow of night into morning."' God gives us some sign or token that we are not alone in our sorrows; He makes us realize that He is near. The grip of a friend's hand, the remembrance of a promise, a sentence in a prayer—these may be the angels He employs. By them He delivers us from the 'terror by night' and the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness.'

¶ 'There is no dark valley here,' cried D. L. Moody as he neared his end. 'No dark valley!' The 'terror by night' had clean gone. At eventide it had become light.

(2) The 'day' also has its dangers. There are dangers that menace us most in our days of success and pride. Indeed we miss the clear teaching of the Bible unless we recognize that prosperity is more perilous to the soul than adversity. The 'terror by night' does not kill like 'the arrow that flieth by day.' The 'pestilence that walketh in darkness' is not half so deadly as the 'destruction that wasteth at noonday.' 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God'—that is the 'arrow that flieth by day.' Scripture is full of illustrations of men who have fallen victims to the perils of the day, from the days of Lot, who, for the sake of the fat pastures of Sodom, well-nigh lost his soul, and of Esau, who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright, down to the days of the rich young ruler who went away sorrowful because he had great possessions, and of Demas, who forsook the Apostle because he loved this present world.

¶ Wealth, or the vain pursuit of it, can stifle the message of life. It need not necessarily do it, but the process by which it does is one of the commonest spectacles of our time. That process is pictured strikingly in Frank Norris' novel, *The Pit*, in which a grain speculator is trapped in a wheat elevator and buried in an avalanche of wheat. Here was the means of supporting life, the wheat, becoming the agent of its destruction. The high purpose of life is obscured with the clutter of its material accessories. Emerson put it in a single sentence, 'The worst thing about money is that it so often costs so much.' So life loses its deep significance; its spiritual flame is snuffed out.[1]

But God has His angels to keep men from the deadly danger of the day, and they are often the angels of Difficulty and Sorrow. When God sees prosperity doing its benumbing work upon a man's soul, when He sees him building all his hopes upon uncertain riches, He allows difficulty and trial to overtake him; and the difficulty and the trial shatter his confidence in mere material gain. When God sees continued and uninterrupted success producing in a man's heart pride and arrogance and a sense of sufficiency, He allows sorrow to overtake him to remind him that he needs a better refuge than money can ever provide; He allows death to invade his family circle to remind him of eternity; He allows sickness to dwell in his home, that he may be driven to seek the Divine comfort. Sorrow is one of God's angels, keeping men in their ways, delivering them from the deadly perils of prosperity and leading them to seek the face of God. 'In my distress I called upon the Lord.' Rightly viewed, our griefs and sorrows are gracious and saving ministries.

¶ Speaking for myself, I thank God for all the years of difficulty, when my heart was so keen with its necessities and its forebodings, when the next day and the next year were so utterly in the hands of God, that life to me was an unbroken chain of evidence. I believe it was this and nothing else that lay behind our Lord's words about riches and poverty; that a feeling of insecurity is something which a wise man should never want to lose, because it, and perhaps it alone, keeps him alive unto God, tender, watchful, liable indeed to awful thrusts of fear, but capable also, at the touch of some little blessing or relief, of an unreasonable gratitude.[1]

[1] H. E. Luccock, *Preaching Values*, 139.

For day and night, for prosperity and adversity, God has His angels. But what about that other and blackest of nights—the 'night' of sin? What 'terrors' attach themselves to this 'night' in the shape of evil memories, accusing consciences and haunting fears! 'Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' cried Paul. He was feeling 'the terror of the night.' But even for that dread night God has His angel. Christ is God's angel to the sin-burdened and the guilty. 'Thanks be to God,' cried the Apostle, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

The Good of Thankfulness

Ps. xcii. 1.—'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.'

'It is a good thing.' This phrase on the lips of the Hebrew Psalmist was the highest expression of approval. Was it not the word of approval that God had for His own works? The idea he intended to convey is one which we frequently find in the Book of Psalms—that it is a reasonable and comely thing to give thanks to God. That there is something perverse and discordant in one who can live in God's world—unless, indeed, he himself has made it a place of misery—and yet never feel the wish to kneel down somewhere, laying a sacrifice of praise upon the altar of the Eternal Spirit. And yet man does not seem by nature to be a creature of gratitude.

The virtues were invited once
  To banquet with the Lord of All;
They came—the great ones rather grim
  And not so pleasant as the small.

They talked and chatted o'er the meal,
  They even laughed with temp'rate glee;
And each one knew the other well,
  And all were good as good could be.

Benevolence and Gratitude
  Alone of all seemed strangers yet;
They stared when they were introduced—
  On earth they never once had met.

[1] John A. Hutton.

It is not till we feel the quickening spirit of that second Man, the Lord from heaven, that we realize how every pulse of the heart that is painless, and every draught of sweet air that goes to the pulsing of the heart, is a call to us to give the Creator thanks and praise.

We, with these wonderful bodies of ours, wherein perpetual renewal and decay goes on, pass through the day and hardly realize that health is a miracle. Seldom at the end of the day, with all its vast vicissitude of harm, still alive and well, do we think it incumbent upon us to give thanks to our Preserver; and when we rise from sleep, refreshed for a new day's work, many of us take it all as such a matter of course that we breathe no prayer of thankfulness to God who spares and tends us, unthanked, unrecognized though He be.

This absence of gratitude, this unalertness of our minds to praise God for His goodness because His love and care are so continued, and His mercy endureth for ever, has an effect we little think of in our own dealings with our fellow-men. We get into a way of taking all their kindnesses and courtesies to us for granted. We go through life with half our best selves dwarfed, because our best self, which is the grateful heart, seldom or never expresses itself, or exercises its faculty of love. We miss the prize of our high calling in Jesus Christ, which is communion with the best and highest in our fellows, as well as with our God, because we have, by our stolid unthankfulness, never opened the doors of our own hearts to them, which gratitude expressed would have done, and never allowed our brothers who did us acts of kindness to perceive that all they did was recognized and gratefully noted.

¶ 'The wild Central-African people of Uganda are a continual rebuke to us civilized Europeans,' says Canon Rawnsley. 'In Uganda no man ever passes another man or woman at work without saying, "Thank you, my brother; thank you, my sister." The Uganda native, at least, has realized that his chance of subsistence and life depends not only on himself, but on the work of others' hands, and he is grateful, and is not ashamed to say so.'

It is a good thing for ourselves to give thanks. Of all the great emotions which have the blessed power of lifting us out of ourselves and sending us away, the purest, the most entirely untainted, is the emotion of gratitude. For whatever reason it may arise, and whatever expression we may give to it, gratitude is the most beautiful of all the possible tumults of the soul. In the hour of gratitude, for one thing, we are ready to take the lowly place. The very idea of thankfulness is that something happened which was beyond our power, something which need not have come to us but which did come to us because of the pure goodness of some one, who may have been in the particular case one of our fellows, or who may have been God Himself. In the hour of gratitude, further, we are full of faith. We feel that we live in an understanding and sympathetic world. In the hour of some fine gratitude all hard and bitter thoughts of life fall from us.

When we are really thankful we always get more than we give. We are the richer for it. To be full of thanks is the only kind of wealth which we really can possess. It is already to have more than we can hold. Truly, as the Wise Man said, 'There is that holdeth back and hath nothing; and there is that scattereth abroad and hath no lack.' Probably we could divide people into two classes which together would include everybody—those who, on the whole, and at bottom, give thanks; and those who do not. Just as there are, strictly speaking, only two frames of mind, only two moods, which really take possession of us—we either feel thankful or we feel grudging. To feel thankful is to be happy; it is to share for one blessed moment the kind of joy which God has eternally: to feel grudging, on the other hand, is to be living within a prison-house, cut off from the song of life.

Notice how happiness and the instinct to give away something are always found together. God has bound together these two. If we take a swift look into our own heart some time when we are really happy what is it we find? We find that at that moment all the movement of our soul is *outwards*, away from ourselves. If we take a swift look into our own heart some time when we are miserable, what do we find? We find that we are silent, possessed by a kind of dumb devil; we find that we are jealous or envious, certainly that we are ungrateful. If we are honest, indeed, we shall be disgusted with our own spiritual appearance at such a moment.

Let us live the *outgoing* life, then, and refuse

to entertain all home-coming thoughts. We are happy only when we are grateful. We taste the true life not when we are standing on our defence, but when as much as may be we are not thinking of ourselves at all. It is a good thing to give thanks—though many stop short there—not completing the idea which is already present in all thanksgiving:

The sense within me that I owe a debt
Assures me—Somewhere must be somebody
Ready to take His due.

It is a good thing to give thanks; yes, but for life's deepest things, for its heights and depths, our thanks must lift its voice to God.

But some one may say, 'Surely we can *feel* grateful to God without saying so, without doing anything out of the common.' Perhaps. But we rightly suspect a man's joy who gives no sign of it. And what is the use of joy if it be not to give us a lift, making us say things and do things out of our usual indeed, and this because we are not *usually* all that we should be.

It is possible that we may feel grateful and yet give no manifestation of it. But it is not possible to enjoy the blessing of gratitude until we in some way let it out. Feelings the very best and holiest only turn in upon themselves and become stale unless they find expression. It is expression which gives to feeling its reality. This is true everywhere. We have not really a conviction until we in some way have declared it, until it may even be we have suffered for it. We have not yet loved another until we have done him or her some beautiful and timid service. We do not love God as we may until we have said so in a prayer or a psalm. We have emotions in order that we may move on and upward in the spiritual plane. What is an emotion but a thing that moves us outwards? The soul lives for the most part by its various expressions of itself. Often our soul is choked with what Dante calls 'lazy smoke.' We are then oppressed by inaction, as a wick may be drowned in oil, actually going out in darkness because of the abundance of the material for burning. It is a time for doing something, for saying something; and that something which we do or say will be like a spark that lets loose the lazy smoke in a glorious flame.

¶ One of the wisest words that have been written concerning the troubles of the Carlyles' household, with which the whole world has been made so needlessly familiar, is that of Dr Garnett: 'He had not fully learned the importance to the sum of happiness in life of frequent and frank expression, in varied mode, of the sentiment lying at the heart.' [1]

Think of the pain of which our unthankfulness, or our voiceless gratitude is the cause. That cry of hurt and wounded love which we hear in the words of Christ: 'Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine?'—as if all His benefits were falling into a deep and silent grave.

Wherefore I cry, and cry again,
And in no quiet canst Thou be
Till I a thankful heart obtain
Of Thee.

Not thankful when it pleaseth me,
As if Thy blessings had spare days,
But such a heart whose pulse shall be
Thy praise! [2]

Fruit with Age

Ps. xcii. 14, 15.—'They shall bring forth fruit in old age . . . to shew that the Lord is upright.'

For some of us the time has come, for all others it is coming, when we can be no longer young. We need, first of all, firmly to recognize the fact. We are becoming old. A quarter of a century ago it was somebody else. Now it is we who are to be old men and old women. It is the inevitable fact, and we should recognize it with self-possession and cheerfulness. Nothing is more absurd than for anyone to be seen clinging to youth after youth has departed: whether it be in dress, or in talk, or in amusement. The pretence does not alter the fact, and above all let us respect the fact. We may succeed in hiding the fact from ourselves, but from other people never! When King Henry said, 'How ill white hairs become a fool and jester,' he meant, 'How ill fooling and jesting become white hairs!'

Nothing is worse in the twilight of life
Than to be from hour to hour more ridiculous.

[1] A. Rowland, *The Exchanged Crowns*, 68.
[2] George Herbert.

In the world about us two types or fashions of age are familiar. We meet with old people who inevitably move us with a sense of pity. The passing years have dealt with them like robbers, filching away so much of what they prized; their activities are narrowed, their faculties are dulled, their friends fall off and die. Once they were courted for their looks, but beauty has deserted them; once they were made much of for their gaiety and high spirits, but these have failed; once they were fond of good eating, but now they are driven back on toast and gruel. Poor old soul! you instinctively cry, in compassion for a life so stripped and naked.

¶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, that blasée woman of society, wrote: 'Society is good: but I have seen society. What is the use of talking or of hearing *bons mots*? I have done both till I am tired of doing either. I have laughed till I have no wish to laugh again, and made others laugh till I have hated them for being such fools.' [1]

This vacancy of old age is most conspicuous where men or women have not lived for big or lasting objects. 'It is faith in something, an enthusiasm for something,' said Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'that keeps life worth living.' Ecclesiastes saw nothing in front of him but the blunting of pleasure, the dulling of sense, the extinguishing of desire, 'because man goeth to his long home.' No one can dispute that in man this process of diminishing runs on; but while some people have eyes for nothing else, there are others who submit to it with perfect good humour and cheerfulness, because they regard it as a stage on the way to a fresh expansion of being. This second class—the nobler type of men and women—may be frail and dim-sighted like the first, but no one can afford to think of them with any touch of pity. Their whole existence rather testifies to something rich and desirable, an inward spring of happiness, a secret of content. Deprivations come upon them, as of course, since they grow old; they cannot walk so fast or so far as they did, their judgment is less prompt, their memory sometimes fails to supply a name at call, but one never attaches to them the notion of impoverishment. Children and all healthy creatures are glad at their coming, for they are not so miserably busy as those who still are in the throng of life, and they always seem to have leisure of heart to listen to eager stories and to plan inevitable kindnesses.

¶ 'My acquaintances tell me unreservedly of their triumphs and their piques; explain their purposes at length, and reassure me with cheerfulness as to their chances of success; insist on their theories and accept me as a dummy with whom they rehearse their side of future discussions; unwind to me their coiled-up griefs. . . . While my desire to explain myself in private ears has been quelled, the habit of getting interested in the experience of others has been continually gathering strength, and I am really at the point of finding that this world would be worth living in without any lot of one's own. Is it not possible for me to enjoy the scenery of the earth without saying to myself, I have a cabbage-garden in it?' [1]

'In this age the noble soul gives itself up unto God,' says Dante, 'and awaits the end of life with much desire. To itself it seems to be going out from the inn to return home to the Father's house; to itself it seems to have come to the end of a long journey, to have crossed the wide sea, and now to be returning into the harbour.' But we must not think of this beautiful old age as an individual peculiarity or a noble accident like genius which appears in one and passes a thousand by. The Scripture speaks of it as possible for all men if only the conditions are observed. 'The path of the just,' it is said, 'is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day;' and another poet describes the godly as 'desiring life and loving many days *that he may see good*.' The longer his life, the more good it seems he has the chance of seeing. He does not desperately clutch on to bare existence like a man to the shelf which overhangs a precipice, but is confident that he has something still to hope for. Such a temper cannot be understood without some knowledge of what accounts for it. Goldwin Smith says somewhere, 'You cannot have all ivy and no wall'—you cannot secure the picturesqueness and attractiveness of character without providing it with some support. In all generations men have passed through the world leaning with their weight upon Jesus Christ, the Living One, and thus they have made proof of His promise that, 'Because I live ye shall live also.' As they grow in years the stuff of their nature seems

[1] R. H. Fisher.

[1] George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ch. i.

to be refined by experience. 'They still bring forth fruit on to old age, thus showing that the Lord is true to His promise.' What is this promise in which He does not fail?

1. *It is a promise of life.*—All God's appeals are addressed to man, not as to a creature of a few days, but as to one whose outlooks have no limit. That is easily credited in the earlier stages of existence and of faith, when everything is expanding and our nature is reaching out to catch at marvels. But later it is not so easy, when a man, unless his faith in God is kept alive, begins to feel that he is approaching the edge where earth and its contentments break away. But faith, when it is present, transforms a man's thought both of to-day and of to-morrow. 'They are creatures of inferior nature that are wholly pleased with the present,' says Lord Manchester. 'Man is a future creature, the eye of whose soul looks beyond this life.' This is the conception of human nature which underlies the image used both by St Peter and by St Paul to describe our body: it is a *tent*, they say, a temporary habitation, quickly erected and as quickly taken down.

Other beliefs than that of orthodoxy have been able to carry men's confidence beyond the limits of the earthly life, though, in all, the arguments presented must often seem slender. A man's ultimate reasons for believing in an enduring life cannot be put on paper; but somewhere, in the deep places of his being, among his instincts and aspirations, there is lodged this assured conviction that death is not the end. The Christian believer has additional reasons of his own to sustain him: he has God's word, in the Bible and in his heart, and on that he rests. And even more, he finds assurance in the fellowship of life with Jesus Christ. His servant may have no clear image as to how the promise is to be fulfilled. The outward man is perishing, he is sometimes ruefully conscious of his growing limitations; and yet he casts himself on God, sure that it was life He spoke of and not death. And, hoping thus, he maintains his interest in the world. He feels that there are always new questions to ask, and answers coming to old questions, there are tasks to attempt and grace provided for them all. If now he sees as in a glass darkly, one day it will be face to face; and this faith sustains his heart and keeps his temper sweet amid infirmities.

Gone, they tell me, is youth,
Gone is the strength of my life;
Nothing remains but decline,
Nothing but age and decay.

Not so; I am God's little child,
Only beginning to live.
Coming the days of my prime,
Coming the strength of my life,
Coming the vision of God,
Coming my bloom and my power.[1]

2. *It is also a promise of care.*—And this care is without limit. When a man has grown old in faith, this care of God is illustrated in his memory by a host of detailed experiences. It has not sheltered him from every hurt, or smoothed the ways he has to travel, for God wishes every son of His to grow up and become a man, with a mind to work and to endure and to sympathize. But though he has not been screened from hardness, yet the help of God to him has never been an idle word. He remembers burdens which, in anticipation, were like to crush him, and they have been borne. His prayers have not gone unheard; he has been guided, strengthened, cheered, enriched.

His whole life has become a course of daily self-committing: 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me,' he says. Thus the end matches the beginning, for as new life begins by faith at the Master's call, so by faith that life is continued, to show that Christ is true to His word. Only between the end and the beginning there is a vast difference in the point of richness. Max Müller has exquisitely said, 'It is easy to deceive oneself in saying that the most perfect faith is a childlike faith. . . . There is indeed the same glow about the setting sun as there is about the rising sun, but there lies between the two a whole world, a journey through the whole sky and over the whole earth.'

And the care of God is not for a man alone but for all the world. Through many shocks of fortune he is sustained by trust in that guiding righteousness which makes all things to work together. God sees and God reigns—that God whose goodness was long ago discovered in the heart. As the years pass, a man is increasingly glad that it is not his part to hold the reins. In looking back, he recognizes

[1] W. N. Clarke.

that at a score of points, had he got his way, he would have blundered into the morass, so he thanks God that he was hindered. Self-assertion and the clamour of opinion have been silenced in him in presence of a world where the forces and the mysteries are alike unsearchable. Questions enough he has to ask, but he has a growing patience in waiting for the answers. Even when disappointments come and sharp bereavements he does not lose his quietness, because in whatever direction he turns he is reminded of the mercy of his God.

This evening sunshine which we admire and envy is not a mere grace of nature; it is a supernatural product, a fruit of God's unfailing kindness, which shows that He is faithful to His promise. 'He is my rock,' says the Psalmist, 'and there is no unrighteousness in him.'

God Revealed in Human Nature

Ps. xciv. 9.—'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?'

Religion rests upon faith, a word, however, which does not signify belief upon insufficient evidence, but rather a deep assurance, springing up within us, as from an inspiration, or as the work of some spiritual instinct; and so St Paul calls faith 'a gift of God.' We are obliged to admit that our faculties are inadequate to comprehend or explain the mysteries of the Divine Being; nor do the aspects of Nature or the facts of life afford us reliable or sufficient help in ascertaining the character of God, or His feelings and intentions towards the human race. If we want to learn what God is—in His nature and intentions towards us—we must look into ourselves, into humanity. If we want to learn what God is in His moral nature, we must look into our own moral nature.

We cannot say that the Creator is *less* than His works, so that He, having created seeing men, is Himself blind, and, having endowed them with the power of hearing, is deaf; having instilled into His creatures the sense of right and the aspiration after goodness, is yet unguided by principles of justice; or that the Creator, having lighted in human beings the spark of love, and made them glow with warm and generous affections, is in His own nature passionless and cold.

1. As opposed to the doctrine of an intelligent, just, and loving God, there are two forms of unbelief to which this question of the Psalmist seems to address itself in a tone of remonstrance.

(1) There is the position of the *Materialist*, who says, 'We see and know matter, and that is all we know or see. Some of it is dead, inorganic matter; some of it is alive, and is passing through ever new stages of development.' The Old Testament tells us of God 'making all things by the word of his power,' regarding the work He had made, and rejoicing to behold that it was 'very good.' It represents His omnipotence in shaping the lot and destinies of men by the figure of the potter who moulds the clay upon the wheel. But, according to the Materialist's way of thinking, not only are we clay in the hands of the potter; the potter is but clay too. It takes away our freedom, not to cast us back upon a Maker on whose intelligence and goodness we can rely, but to fling us under the wheels of a blind, unreasoning power. No one could believe, in looking at a beautiful vase, that the shapely thing had rounded itself upon the wheel or that chance had produced such symmetry. Yet that is what the Materialist says the earth has done and is doing. It has made itself. Inanimate matter has somehow grown alive. The lifeless clod has kindled itself into a living soul. Thought, feeling, hearing, sight, knowledge, and love, and the sense of duty—all are but the natural product of the sand and mud beneath our feet!

¶ Bishop Barnes, in his Gifford Lectures, says: 'I confess I can form no satisfactory understanding of the process which has led to the creation of matter as we now know it save on the assumption that some Cosmic Artificer has been at work.'

(2) The other position, no less unsatisfactory to heart and reason, is that of the *Pantheist*. There is a good deal of Scripture phraseology which he can and does adopt; as, for instance, that in God we live and move and have our being. But, while thus using the name of God and some Scripture language concerning Him, he does not acknowledge God as existing above His works, before them, superior to them, watching over them with full consciousness of their progress. He regards God as the energy in the world. He may call it a spiritual energy, but he does not mean by that a conscious

mind. It is, as some one has said, a soul that 'sleeps in the sod, dreams in the plant, and awakens to full consciousness in man.' We cannot address this Being in the majestic words of St John, 'Thou who art and wast, and art to come.' We can only say that He is to come. He, strictly speaking, does not yet exist, or exists only imperfectly. He is 'the one far-off, divine event, to which the whole Creation moves'—prompted by some dark hidden instinct, along a line of infinite progress; but that instinct has not been implanted by one who planned and oversees the whole, and knows the end from the beginning.

To some, such a view is commended by the degree to which it is pervaded with a sense of the mystery which surrounds the doctrine of God. But no sober and just expression of Christian belief fails to recognize that mystery. 'His thoughts,' says the Prophet, 'are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.' His existence in us, and yet infinitely above us, inhabiting eternity and yet working out a purpose in the world of Time, is a thing no Christian can pretend thoroughly to comprehend. But surely the belief in One who made us and all things, and who sees and knows and loves—One who, being over all in wisdom and in power, is controlling the course of events, and redeeming the world from its evil—surely such a belief, mysterious as it may be, is simple and reasonable, when compared with the speculations we have just described. A thing cannot be greater than its cause, though the cause may be infinitely greater than the effect which we at any moment see. If we dig in the ground we find water; it rises in the well or streams up in the fountain. But we know that it is not springing from empty spaces in the earth. It is

fed by the skyey shower,
And clouds that sink and rest on hilltops high.

The pressure is passed on through unseen fissures in the rock, and the highest level it can reach is not so high as the upland source. So is it with human life and sense and knowledge and affection. There can be nothing in them that is not more eminently in Him from whom they come. Therefore the genius of the men we admire and the goodness of those whom we love should awaken worship and love still more profound for the great God whose nature is therein faintly revealed. 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?' He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know? He that created the heart of man, with its deep tenderness and passionate love, shall not there be in Him too, a love beyond that of an earthly father for his children?

¶ 'It allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks,' says Dolly Winthrop, 'and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i' the middle o' the night—it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got—for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me.'[1]

¶ When Kirchoff was endeavouring to discover the elements present in the Sun, he thrust, between the image of the Sun and the tinted band of his spectroscope, a flame of sodium vapour, and when he saw the subduing effect of his experiment upon the band, he left the laboratory hastily with the words: 'That seems to me a fundamental fact.' He had discovered, by his examination, the existence of the vapour of sodium in the Sun and had done so through the existence of the same element in his laboratory.[2]

'He that formed the eye, shall he not see?' The more we reflect on the wonders which the sense of sight unfolds, the more strongly will the conclusion be borne in upon us that they exist not alone for our beholding. On far-off mountain peaks, where man's foot rarely or never comes, the sunrise reddens the snows; in moorland solitudes the lichen clothes the rock, the heather blooms, flowers spring up amid the short grass, shaping themselves into forms as perfect as in the tended garden. Is all that wealth of beauty lost? Surely not. He that hath fitted us to find a pure delight in all that wondrous spectacle finds, beyond doubt, His own ineffable joy in the glories of His handiwork.

God takes pleasure in the thing
That only He can see,
The flowers that in the desert spring,
The birds that fold the wearied wing
On some far forest tree.

So may we argue from every fact of human experience, from every human capacity, to a

[1] George Eliot, *Silas Marner*.
[2] T. H. Davies, *Spiritual Voices in Modern Literature*, 229.

higher intelligence. Their very incompleteness points to One who possesses not only what they have but what they lack. And nowhere does the argument come with the same force as when we turn our attention to our own moral culture. How shall we account for that mysterious sense of right which dwells in the human breast, save by reference to Him whose name is holy? The law that is written on the heart commends belief in a lawgiver who wrote it there.

2. The instinctive teaching of our heart is confirmed by the later revelation of the gospel. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ has set the seal upon it. From the standpoint of the Psalmist we can argue that He who planted the ear will hear. In the New Testament we are told explicitly that He does hear, and that whatever we shall ask the Father in Christ's name He will give us. From the same standpoint we conclude that He who formed the eye must see. By the mouth of our Saviour we are told that He does see all that takes place upon the earth, that not a sparrow falls to the ground unobserved by Him. Similarly, He who has given us a heart and the power of loving cannot be Himself devoid of love: but the gospel is emphatically the 'good news,' in that it brings to us this assurance—'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' What has made this wonderful difference between the old time and the new—between the hopes and aspirations and arguments of the old, and the explicit teaching of the new? It is the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. In Jesus Christ the everlasting God comes down and takes our human nature entire upon Himself. Clothed in it He speaks the words of truth to us, and in his actions exhibits the goodness, the tenderness, the sympathy, that are in the heart of the Eternal. This means that the whole universe is robbed of the dread and terror of cold unfriendliness; that, just as confidently as if Jesus Christ were here to-day, we should look up in His face with the certainty of finding pitying forgiveness and comfort there for all our deepest sorrows, so surely and confidently may we appeal to the unseen God.

So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!'

The Cure for Care

Ps. xciv. 19.—'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.'

This Psalm is a cry for help against the insolence and cruelty of Israel's oppressors, evidently at a time when the nation has been under the heel of heathen conquerors. It begins with an appeal to God as the righteous Judge to put an end to the tyranny of wicked rulers who crush the weak and 'break in pieces thy people, O Lord.' It passes from a cry to God into an appeal to the people, reminding them of the argument for faith, an argument all the greater because of their dire necessity. God is not indifferent, or ignorant. He who planted the ear hears, and He who formed the eye sees. He knows at once the arrogant inhumanity of the oppressors, and the sorrows of His people. For the one there is a day of retribution; for the other a day of redemption. There is a Divine purpose to be wrought out through all the struggle and the sorrow, a purpose of moral discipline and a purpose of supreme love. 'The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.' There is no help for them but in God, but it is much for them to realize that in the deepest straits and the darkest passes of life there is unfailing help in Him. It is everything to know that He stands by their side; and faith sees not only that God will deliver them in the future, but that He has been with them even through all their sore trial.

The Psalmist quietens his soul by his comforting faith. He sees that if the Lord had not been his help all would have been ended long since. 'When I said, my foot hath slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, was holding me up.' It is a vivid figure of compassing grace. In the very crisis when all seemed over and he gave himself up for lost he discovered that love had gripped him and was holding him all the time. Amid wickedness, rampant and triumphant, enmity without and trouble within, he entered into peace through the assurance of God's presence. In the multitude of my thoughts—doubts, distracting cares, the tumult of heart and brain—

Thy comforts delight my soul. There is a refuge from all the storms of life, a place of repair, where the soul gathers strength.

Times alter and circumstances change, but the essentials of life remain, and this cry of a wounded heart is the human cry, and we can interpret the Psalm for our own individual needs and personal situation. We are set in the midst of strife and perplexity, but worse than the tumult outside is the tumult within. Cares and doubts and fears seem set in the midst of us. There can be no abiding consolation and no complete solution of the riddle of life, no safe refuge, except somewhere within where the soul can find rest. If life is meaningless, empty of any spiritual purpose, the world is a place of despair as much to us as the terrible situation depicted by the Psalmist of old. We, like him, and as much as he, need the comfort of God's love for the multitude of our cares.

What cares these are, and what a multitude of them! There are *personal* cares: for example, the pressure of necessities, the troubles and anxieties, disappointments and unfulfilments, pain of body, distress of mind, grief of heart, sorrow of soul. It is a world of strife, a world of loss, a world of sin; and who can give name to the multitude of thoughts and cares bred by strife and loss and sin? Sorer, perhaps, than personal cares are some of the cares *for others* which oppress many a heart. A father toils in weakening strength with haunting fears of what the future will bring to those he loves best when strength at last gives out. A mother waits in tears for the footfall of a son, with dread for his coming, or greater dread that he come not. We can fill up many a story from such vague hints of the outlines.

The world is built as if for discipline, and its one need is comfort of some sort. There is so much pain and sorrow and tears, so much darkness and weakness and sin, so much unrest and dispeace and distress. There is sorrow on the sea as it moans and breaks on the shores of life. And if we will but look resolutely at ourselves, what life does not know its troubles without and fears within, its dark moments, its difficult passes, its dangers and distresses? Men live in the shadow, oppressed with care and anxiety, burdened with loads too heavy, harassed with fears and doubts. There are many lonely lives, and tempted lives, and hearts that have said good-bye to happiness, and souls of men that are full of bitterness and despair. And for all such there is no other permanent refuge, no other abiding comfort, than faith in God's eternal love. There is no true argument against care except the argument for faith. Our Lord based all His teaching on this argument, pointing ever to the Father's love, and Himself walked with sure tread and drank the cup of human life and tasted what it is for a man to die, with His heart fixed on God, with the Divine comforts delighting His soul. 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid, *believe*,' He said. The only cure for care is the cure of faith.

¶ In the November of 1902 a remarkable letter appeared in the *Spectator*. It was written by Mr Frank Bullen. A reviewer, noticing his latest book, had found fault with him for depreciating the culture of Matthew Arnold; and this was Mr Bullen's reply. Never, he said, would he decry real culture; it helped towards the highest enjoyment and elevation; but a million Matthew Arnolds could not preach good tidings to the poor as Jesus Christ did. As for himself, when his wife was lying ill, when his children were hungry, when his resources were at an end, when he might have been tempted to despair and self-murder, he had known the blessedness of 'a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' Matthew Arnold, he went on, was a sweet poet; he could weld into harmonious cadences the great words of our language; but, when it came to proclaiming the Gospel, he was less than the least of believers; and the knowledge of man's deepest difficulties, and of the heavenly remedy for them, did not appear to have touched his comfortable heart. He had written:

> Resolve to be thyself, and know that he
> Who finds himself loses his misery.

But Mr Bullen would paraphrase:

> Resolve to seek thy Lord, and know that he
> Who finds the Christ loses his misery.[1]

The remedy for care is to know the love of God in Christ, and that remedy is open to us, not fitfully and casually, but always and everywhere. The Divine comforts which delight the soul are

[1] A. Smellie, *Service and Inspiration*, 102.

not merely the comfort of hope hereafter, but the comfort of fellowship and communion now, realizing God's love at every turn of the road and walking with Him through this great wilderness. Trouble and pain and sorrow and loss are still facts of life; we have to meet them as all flesh must. We must quiver at the sting of death and be trampled down by the grave's victory, but we do not go alone, and even in the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil.

What though the path be all unknown?
What though the way be drear?
Its shades I traverse not alone
When steps of Thine are near.
Thy presence, ere it passed above,
Suffused its desert air;
Thy hand has lit the torch of love,
And left it burning there.[1]

The Strength of the Hills

Ps. xcv. 4.—'The strength of the hills is his also.'

THERE is something about the hill-country which seems to make for strength of character. The men who live in the heart of the hills often have a breadth, a sturdiness, a solidity about them which is foreign to those who dwell in cities. And in spite of a rough exterior they have an innate refinement which sets them in the company of Nature's noblemen. Environment has its part to play in the history of mankind. Beautiful surroundings do not necessarily make beautiful characters, but those whose lot is cast amid such surroundings certainly have something in their favour. The men of old time were justly proud of the mountains which were round about Jerusalem, and they sang of them with full hearts, and immortalized them in many a noble psalm. The mountains played a prominent part in their national history. Hermon, Nebo, Lebanon, Olivet—each of them is associated with some striking scene, some memorable event, and it is no wonder that these famous hills were regarded with a religious awe, and were celebrated in national song, and became dear to the heart of every patriot. One envies the men who live among the hills. The county of Cambridgeshire is so flat that it is said that if you stand upon a brick you can see over the whole country. Who could write a psalm about a country like that? There is something infinitely more suggestive in the strength of the hills. Let us look, then, at the hills in their religious suggestiveness.

What is the strength of the hills? Strength is not one characteristic, but a combination of characteristics. It is a harmony of various elements. There are three elements at least which may prove religiously suggestive and helpful.

1. *Grandeur.*—Nature has many aspects, and God is behind them all; but the mass and grandeur, the vast solitudes and deep recesses in the heart of the hills, are, in a peculiar sense, the inner shrine where He waits for those who come, worn and confused, from the noise and strife of the world. Here the sounds of man's struggle are lost in His peace; here the fever of desire and the agitation of emotion are calmed in His silence. The great hills, purple with heather or green with moss, rise peak beyond peak in sublime procession; the mountain streams run dark and cool through dim and hidden channels, singing that song without words which is sweet with all purity and fresh with the cleanness of the untrodden heights. Through the narrow passes one walks with a silent joy, born of a renewed sense of relationship with the sublime order of the world, and of a fresh communion with the Spirit of which all visible things are the symbol and garment. This is perhaps the greatest service which the hills of God render to him who seeks them with an open mind and heart. Their grandeur silently dispels one's scepticism in the possible greatness of man's life. In a world where such heights rise in lonely majesty, the soul, to which they speak with voices so manifold and so eloquent, feels anew the Divinity which shapes its destiny, and gains a fresh faith in the things that are unseen and eternal.[1]

¶ Mr Struthers travelled round the world. In India he was much moved by the grandeur of the Himalayas. One of the heights is Kinchinjinga, between Sikkim and Nepal, over 28,000 feet. 'At length,' he says, 'the mist cleared away, and there stood before us, white with everlasting snow, the top of Kinchinjinga. I need scarcely tell you that to look at it over the ten ranges of intervening mountains, that

[1] George Matheson, *Sacred Songs*, 86.

[1] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 81.

ever rose higher and higher the nearer they came to Kinchinjinga, was our chief occupation for three days. When we went to church on Sabbath and heard in the morning service that "the strength of hills is his also," we got a new idea of the words. They were away up in the clouds, those hills, with an awful barrier look about them, and yet they rose so gradually you felt God could have made mountains twice as high. There was no feeling of effort about them at all.' [1]

¶ Ruskin, in his *Modern Painters*, has called attention to a suggestive fact. It is that the greatest painters of the Holy Family have always a hint of the mountains in the distance. What they felt was, with one of these intuitions which are the birthright and the seal of genius—what they felt was that for a secular subject vineyard and meadow might be a fitting background; but for the Holy Family, and for the Child of God, and for the love of heaven incarnate in humanity, you want the mystery, the height, the depth, which call to the human spirit from the hills. It is not to man as a being with an intellect that the hills have spoken their unvarying message. It is to man as a being with a soul, with a cry in his heart for things that are above him. That is why Zeus in the old Pagan days came down to speak to men upon Mount Ida. That is why Genius painting Jesus Christ throws in its faint suggestion of the peaks.[2]

2. *Permanence.* — Who that has looked thoughtfully upon the mountains could imagine anything more typical of the immovable? Their sunless pillars are sunk so deep in earth that we cannot dream of their being moved out of their place; the idea of the fugitive and the transient is excluded as we contemplate the fixity of the hills. An Old Testament writer, indeed, has made them an image of permanence when he says that, sooner than imagine that the kindness of God can pass away or that the mercy of the Eternal can cease, the very mountains shall pass and the hills be removed. But even as he regards the one impossible, so he is sure that the character of God is fixed and unchangeable for ever. The hills speak to us of the permanence of the Divine. A fickle God would be worse than none at all. A God whose principles of action were continually changing would be the terror and not the inspiration of His worshippers. It is in the life and heart of man that the changes take place. So constant is the ebb and flow of events, so swiftly do the scenes shift, so suddenly may the whole course of a life be altered, so awesome and so frequent are the changes on the narrow stage of Time, that we are only too thankful to embrace a doctrine which gives us a sense of stability in the everlasting love of God. It would make for madness if we could not counterbalance the flux of Time with the years of the right hand of the Most High.

When I was young the days were long,
Oh, long the days when I was young:
So long from morn to evenfall
As they would never end at all.

Now I grow old Time flies, alas!
I watch the years and seasons pass.
Time turns him with his fingers thin
A wheel that whirls while it doth spin.

There is no time to take one's ease,
For to sit still and be at peace:
Oh, whirling wheel of Time, be still,
Let me be quiet if you will!

Yet still it turns so giddily,
So fast the years and seasons fly,
Dazed with the noise and speed I run
And stay me on the Changeless One.

I stay myself on Him who stays
Ever the same through nights and days:
The One Unchangeable for aye,
That was and will be: the one Stay,

O'er whom Eternity will pass
But as an image in a glass;
To whom a million years are nought,—
I stay myself on a great Thought.

I stay myself on the great Quiet
After the noises and the riot;
As in a garnished chamber sit
Far from the tumult of the street.

Oh, wheel of Time, turn round apace!
But I have found a resting-place.
You will not trouble me again
In the great peace where I attain.[1]

[1] Katharine Tynan Hinkson.

[1] *Life and Letters of John Paterson Struthers, M.A.*, 63.
[2] G. H. Morrison, *The Return of the Angels*, 100.

3. *Outlook.*—To see the landscape lying outspread before the eye, to see the country stretching away to the distant horizon, to realize the sense of vastness, to revel in the subtle poetry of distance—this is enough to make us toil up the steep path, and scale the rugged crag, and for a moment call the spreading scene our own. And it is this sense of outlook we need to get into our religion if we would obtain from it the best it has to give us. There is no faith which gives to man such a sense of vastness as the faith of Jesus Christ. The outlook He gives is so commanding and so rich that the eye cannot take it all in, and the mind reels as it tries to grasp it. But the heart is satisfied with that outlook, and pronounces it very good. It includes the whole field of this life that now is, and fills it with a nobler and a deeper meaning than we ever knew before. Jesus shows us the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, and we know that their true kingship is in brotherhood, and their real glory in righteousness. But the outlook of Jesus is of wider extent than this. He takes us with Him and allows us a glimpse of the view which lies beyond the hills of death. 'In my Father's house are many mansions'—many rooms, many homes, many resting-places. It is enough. We live indeed in the Father's house now, but there is another wing of it into which we have not been as yet, and into which we can enter only through the shadowy pass of death. We stand by the side of the Saviour and look beyond into the eternal city.

The Sea

Ps. xcv. 5.—'The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.'

'THE sea is his, and he made it.' How strange that there should be at least three times as much sea as land. Standing on the shore and looking over the vastness of the waters the first thought that creeps into our mind is that of loneliness and awe. We can almost hear the Almighty's challenge to the patriarch Job,

Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?
Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?

We are impressed with our ignorance and littleness, and with the greatness and wisdom of God.

Do we know anything of the Divine intention in the sea?

1. There is the mighty influence which the sea has exercised on the civilization of mankind. God has enlisted many varied instruments in lifting His children out of savagery. He has helped them upon the upward road by the mountain and the river and the moor. But it is questionable if among all His instruments, used with a patience of skill that is Divine, there has been any quite so mighty as the sea. Have we ever considered why, in a heathen continent, things get darker and darker towards the centre? The farther we pierce into the heart of Africa, the more inveterate and awful is the savagery. The farther we go from the engirdling ocean, with its unceasing and mysterious ministries, the farther we travel from liberty and light. On the great rolling steppes of Central Asia thousands of years ago there roamed the Scythians. And on these rolling steppes their Tartar children are bivouacking still; unchanged, after the passing of the centuries; uninfluenced by the progress of humanity, because untouched by the message of the sea.

¶ 'The ancient Grecians and Phœnicians,' says Lamartine, 'imbibed something of the perpetual agitation and insubordination of the sea. The spectacle of the ocean renders man more free and impatient of restraint, for he constantly beholds the image of liberty in its waves, and his soul imbibes the independence of the element.'

We talk of the sea as that which divides the world, when it is really the sea that binds the world. It is the moor, the desert, the shaggy mountain that is the real divider. That is why wellnigh every great metropolis has been set in close connection with the sea. Tyre and Carthage, Athens, Venice, London, have all stretched out their hand towards the ocean. And it is in them that commerce has grown kingly, and literature has clothed itself in immortality, and art has rejoiced and blossomed.

2. There is the sway which the sea has always exercised over the imagination of mankind. It was Horace Bushnell who said that God gave man imagination that he might have a door to enter by. Now have we ever thought why many a thing of beauty leaves the imagination cold and dead? Is it not that in such beauty, though sensuously perfect, there is no presence

of the element of mystery? It is the soul behind the features that haunts, the mystery of spirit that appeals to the imagination. Without the suggestion of what we cannot penetrate the imagination never is awakened. That is why Christianity has so powerfully quickened the imagination of mankind. It is because at the heart of all its beauty there lies for ever that element of mystery. And that is why the vision of the sea has profoundly influenced imagination also: it is so beautiful, and so mysterious. So slowly and surely as civilization advances, the sense of mystery is being driven from the earth; but all the progress of a thousand centuries will never drive the mystery from the sea. You may wean Africa from her state of savagery but you cannot wean the ocean from her tempests.

¶ Says Jefferies: 'There is an infinite possibility about the sea; it may do what it is not recorded to have done. It is not to be ordered. It may overleap the bounds human observation has fixed for it. It has potency unfathomable. There is still something in it not quite grasped and understood—something still to be discovered—a mystery.'

There is the mystery of distance. It stretches away from us, silent and unbroken, until it seems to enter the unknown. Neither prairie nor desert conveys such a vague sense of distance—there is a suggestion of the infinite about the sea. And there is also the mystery of depth, and of all the secrets that are hidden in the depth.

Not only has the sea through all the ages quickened the imagination of mankind. It has evoked heroic qualities of character. It has been the noble office of the hills to quicken and sustain the love of liberty. It has been the duty of the valleys to give to their countrymen the charm of song. And it has been one great ministry of level land to foster that patient, quiet labour without which no land is ever wealthy, and no harvest ever ripens. God has His work for hill and plain to do. And the sea also is His, for He made it. Shall it not also have its appointed office? Unquestionably it has had that office, and has been exercising it through all the centuries, in calling out the heroic in humanity. What heroes the first navigators were! There were no charts for them—no lighthouses—no sound of bell on any sunken reef. Keats talks of 'perilous seas forlorn.' There was a time when every sea was that; a time when no man knew, driving before the wind, if he were making for El Dorado or Charybdis. And yet the tiny, fragile vessels went forth into a world of waters; and behind them is all the sunshine on the grass, and the voices of children, and the peace of home. In a difficult world like this there is needed that heroic message which has ever been the message of the sea. It has turned the faces of men to the unknown. It has given the faculty of swift response in the presence of unexpected difficulties. It has contributed to human character what the tilling of the soil could never give.

3. There is another message of the sea. It has helped to keep alive in every age the sense of the majesty of God. It has sometimes been charged against our Christian faith that it dims the thought of the majesty of God. We address Him as our Father, not as the great Creator. We take the most intimate of all relationships, and we use that of God. Have we not at times felt in the prayers of men and women a certain jarring as of familiarity? Have we never been conscious in our own prayers that the thought of the awfulness of God was lacking? Whenever we are tempted to forget that in the hurry and fever of activity, God provides us with two mighty spectacles which silently bring it to the heart again. The one is the sky, the silent, starry sky; the other is the sea. The one is far away and inaccessible; the other is washing at our feet. Yet both are so vast that they suggest infinity, so filled with power that we feel our helplessness, so still upon a summer evening that for us beyond these voices there is peace. The flowers and the meadows speak of the providence and love of God, but when we turn to the ocean with its infinite distances, within whose depths are hid a million secrets, we feel that He whom we have known in Christ is sovereign, and of majesty unsearchable. We must never lose that sense in any ecstasy, and amidst all the pressure of life we must sustain it.

The Psalmist says to the people that God's paths are in the sea—that the sea is His and He made it. It is difficult for us who are an island nation, and who regard the ocean as our defence and our ally, to understand the dread the Jews had of the sea. They loved their gardens and their vineyards, and the Lord was there. But

the way of the Lord was also in the sea which they shunned. We are all of us apt to think that God has forgotten us when the experience we dislike arrives, yet His purposes work out through what is dark as well as through what is bright. Let us believe that what is hardest to bear is never purposeless or pathless, and so have that victorious faith which can look over a waste of waters and say 'The sea also is his, and he made it.'

The Value of Worship

Ps. xcv. 6.—'O come, let us worship and bow down.'

It has been said that our church services need to be made not more attractive but more worshipful. But we must have no narrow notions of what the worship of God is. We must not think that we have worshipped God simply because we have sung hymns of praise and adoration, and said prayers, unless these words express inward realities of our spiritual life. Nor, even if they do, are they the whole of worship. One has sometimes heard it said that certain people go to hear the sermon, not to worship. But the sermon, if it be of the right kind, and the hearing be also of the right kind, will be worship. Worship is no mere emotion, it is thoughtfulness also. And, in addition to these two, there is an element of will in worship. A man does not really worship until he wills the good.

1. Worship may be defined as the reverent concentration of the whole inner being upon its supreme ideal, that movement of the soul which leads it into the light of love and the presence of the Father. Now, whatever helps that reverent concentration, whether it be prayer, or a hymn, or music, or the sermon, helps worship. If we want a truly religious service each one should aim for that reverent concentration.

¶ Robert Barclay paid a beautiful tribute to the influence of the Quaker meeting when he said: 'When I came into the Silent Assemblies of God's people I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart and, as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me, and the good raised up.'

The Psalmist's invitation to worship might be rendered literally, 'O come, let us prostrate ourselves, let us bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.' The word which is rendered 'worship' means 'prostration' literally—nothing less than prostration. The two words which follow mean something less emphatic: the first the bending of the body while the worshipper still stands, the second kneeling. Nothing changes in the East so far as habit is concerned; and you cannot to-day enter a mosque without seeing each of these three words acted on; sometimes the worshipper bends the head and shoulders, then he kneels, then he prostrates himself entirely. This, so far as the outward posture goes, is undoubtedly what the Psalmist meant to invite the congregation of Israel to do, as being the outward expression of worship. But worship is an inward act of the soul which corresponds to those postures of the body. It is the homage of the soul to truth and to God. It is humility, not humiliation. So far as the intellect is concerned it is not a denial of its full exercise, but only a recognition of its limitations. When Ezekiel, seeing the glory of the Lord, fell upon his face on the earth, the voice said to him: 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.' God wants no man to think himself nothing; rather He wants him to realize all the Divine possibilities there are in him; He wants him to feel how much he can be, and how much he can do, that is good and noble. If we have any due sense of the greatness and holiness of God, the soul will bow in the Divine presence; will recognize that there is a will greater than the personal, individual will, and an object to live for infinitely grander than any that concerns the mere individual self. There is something here to fill one with awe, and with longing too, so that 'Come let us worship and bow down' will be an invitation to which the soul will readily respond. But in this prostration there is a strength for rising into stronger and nobler life. We will not have less self-respect through bowing to God, but more. The self that has so bowed is a greater self, and a stronger. It can stand up in the presence of that same God and receive further revelation. No soul is demeaned by its homage to what is high and great; no spirit is abased through adoration of the All-Adorable. Indeed, it is the man that has most truly bowed before God who is best able to stand erect in the world. Worship is an act of homage, but in the homage itself is aspiration—a yearning towards God and the fullness of His life.

2. If we make our worship a true one it will help us to meet two of the great needs of our life.

(1) One is the need for a sufficiency of spiritual conviction to secure a centre of repose in life. It should help everyone to realize that he has a soul of his own; to realize his true self, which is continuous with the larger life of God. When we get down into ourselves beneath the little self-seeker who is directing so many of our operations, we find that in reality we are very different from what we superficially think ourselves to be. We can find the greater depths in our own souls that go down, as it were, into the very eternity of God. And if we commune with ourselves there, we shall obtain a certain amount of conviction which we shall not merely owe to others, which will not be ours merely by tradition, but really our own, and when we find it so, there will be a power of calm in it that external tumults will not be able to disturb, at any rate not be able to break up. Through real worship we shall grow to be conscious of a self which is not the doubting self, the wavering self, the self which looks out for personal advantages, which is liable to all sorts of shocks and disappointments; but a self that knows it belongs to God, a self that takes hold of the best and deepest and most spiritual there is in life, a self which draws its nourishment out of the hidden resources of the eternal. Now, surely to gain this would be an invaluable treasure to any life. Most of us are tempest-driven, and we need this inner refuge; most of us are beset by many temptations, and we need this strong tower, the tower of a deep inward consciousness that we belong to God.

(2) The other great need is strength of character to recognize this claim of God upon us in all our intercourse and relationship with men. Worship is a stimulus to action. If it be true that 'to work is to pray' it is also true that to pray is to work. 'True worship,' says John Wilhelm Rowntree, 'is never selfish.'

¶ One wants a temple beside the outdoor temple—a place where human beings do not ramble apart but meet with a common impulse. And as true worship can never be selfish, so, though it may have in it an element of mysticism, it will never be unpractical. Divine service consists not in ceremonial, nor yet wholly in the gratification of personal desires after the Infinite, but in labour for the brotherhood. The work of Jesus Christ must be the work of His Church. Such work is worship. The passionate longing of men fired by the vision of Christ and sustained by Him is to do the Father's will on earth as it is done in heaven. There is room yet for a witness of that inward life, which draws out nourishment from the hidden love of God, and bears rich fruit in holy fellowship, blessed by the unity of a common consciousness that God, the world, and humanity are one.[1]

We are not truly worshipping unless this feeling of the unity of the world is flowing into us. Worship is not true unless it is making us better members of society, inspiring endeavours in every direction towards a juster and a kinder life. The place of the sermon as part of worship is to enforce ideals, and to insist upon their application to conduct in every department of life. We cannot really worship God while we either hate, or despise, or neglect, or in any way wrong our fellow-men. It is in men that God is incarnate. Every man is in a sense a Divine being; it is only by virtue of God in him that he is a man at all. And it is useless to suppose that we can be in a really worshipful attitude on Sunday if we live without acknowledging worth in humanity every day of our life. The preaching of practical righteousness is therefore an essential part of true worship, for the righteous and brotherly spirit has to be cherished in man. For where is the Divine life to be lived except in the world of human relations? The urging of social duty is therefore an essential part of worship. The worship that goes forth in praise to God for His goodness and love must also express itself in practical goodness and love towards our fellow-men in the world. And it is only by the practical test that the world will acknowledge it; indeed it is only by the practical test that we ourselves can be sure of it.

¶ Sir Wilfred Grenfell's long experience of work on the Labrador coast leads him to say: 'Whether we, our neighbour, or God is the judge, absolutely the only value of our "religious" life to ourselves or to anyone is what it fits us for and enables us to do.'

We may test and measure the reality of our worship of God by the strength or the weakness of that consciousness of unity with all the world and with all men. If it stops, for example, with our nation, then we are worshipping a tribal god. If it stops with our sect, then we are worshipping

[1] George Eliot.

a sectarian idol. If we wish to worship the God of the whole earth we must feel the oneness of all, and admit the obligation of care for all and good-will toward all. The worship of the highest means service of the lowest. It is a high standard, but it is the standard we must aim at. In worship it is the standard we acknowledge, and it must be our constant endeavour to bring life into line with it.

If our worship is true, therefore, we shall feel that the evil things in us, and the small and petty things, the prejudices that divide us, the passions that make us enemies, die down, and the fruits of the spirit, which are love, meekness, humility, gentleness, forbearance, grow. Coming to church is not serving its purpose in our lives unless the ugly things are more and more destroyed, and the beautiful things more and more nourished. Let us worship and bow in spirit before the Highest, that we may rise to receive from God the words of the larger and better life.

Come, abide in us for ever;
Build Thy city in our heart,
On Thy righteousness, and never
From its citadel depart.
Fill us with Thy holy awe,
Make us prophets of Thy law,
Worthy of our high vocation
In the world's great congregation.

A New Song

Ps. xcvi. 1.—'O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.'

The Psalms in which the words 'a new song' occur can be confidently traced to the period of the Restoration after the Captivity. The return to the land of their fathers; the rebuilding of the waste places; the establishment afresh of the worship of God in his 'habitation holy'—these things meant so much to a people, who, for long, by the waters of Babylon had sat down and wept, that they felt that a new anthology must be constructed, rightly to express their new understanding of the heart of God. The old songs were good, and the lilt of them ran tenderly in their ears; but they spoke of a God not known as God was now. So, let new songs be written expressive of the knowledge of God as Redeemer and Restorer, meaning good unto His people. 'We have come to know that His power is gracious; sing unto the Lord a new song,' said they.

Thus it is that these Psalms fulfil one condition of true poetry. They express the thoughts of a people. They are the satisfaction of the desire of the national heart for utterance. Professor Courthope, writing on English poetry, says: 'The poet is, in a sense, the epitome of the imaginative life of his age and nation; and, indeed, it may be said that in what may be called his raw materials—his thought, imagination, and sentiment—his countrymen co-operate in his work. The inward life of our nation is reflected not less clearly in the course of our poetry than its outward growth in the achievements of its laws, arms, and commerce.'

Whilst it is given to few to present their raw materials of sentiment and desire in that splendid form which poets use, we can at least be of those who use the nobler songs as the expression of the inexpressible in our own hearts, and of those who contribute to that national life which is bound to express itself not only in new song, but in new song unto the Lord.[1]

We ought to be singing a new song unto the Lord. Many of the old songs have lost their power for us; they no longer touch the springs of our emotion, or express the ecstasies of our faith. We have other battles to fight, and other victories to celebrate; or, if we have not, then it will not avail for craven hearts to repeat the triumphs of nobler men and women. New times need new men, and new men should sing new songs, welling up spontaneously from the depths of their own hearts.

¶ 'Our age,' wrote Emerson long ago—and with qualifications it is still true of us to-day—'is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes the biographies, historic criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight instead of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs? There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.'

1. A new song means *a new and living experience.* We read of creative ages and eras in art, in literature and music; and under this

[1] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 167.

phrase we think there lies a great mystery. So there does; but the mystery is not all dark, for it is the mystery of a generation of men and women intensely alive—alive to beauty, or to adventure, or to religion, or to all three. And when we call an age introspective, or self-conscious, or critical, as opposed to creative, we ban that age as lacking in vigour, and glow, and vitality. It is an age of imitators who can only repeat what others have said because they have nothing fresh to say, and sing old songs because they are not capable of inventing new ones.

We grow tired of the long perspectives and far-off vistas of our religious lives. 'God has not spoken for nineteen centuries, since the last gospel was compiled and the last epistle written.' Such is the assumption that underlies much of our theologies and our creeds. We keep looking back; straining our eyes into the mist of antiquity; building our neat little temples out of the chips and fragments of those grand old sanctuaries in which the ancients worshipped God face to face, and felt the breath of His Spirit on their souls. Is it right that we should dishonour the living God so? Has He, then, nothing to say to us? Can we not live near to Him and hear His voice, and realize His mighty, moving presence in our own hearts? Surely, if we cannot, it is not because He has no word to say; it is because we have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand. We shall never sing a new song till we have lived a real, pulsing, genuine new life of our own, not the pale shadow of other and greater lives.

This does not mean that our faith is to be made independent of, or to be cut off from, the past; or that we need another gospel or a new Christ. The fact is that we are called upon to sing new songs, as somebody has said, about very old providences. As our physical life is rooted in the immemorial generations of the past, so our spiritual nature is fed by filaments which strike deep into the subsoil of past centuries of faith and experience. 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive?' is true of the content of our faith as of nothing else. But if we receive our religion only as a tradition, instead of using it as a foundation from which to rear our own temple of worship, as a vantage-ground from which to start our exploration of new spiritual horizons for ourselves, as the raw material out of which we may weave our own garment of praise, then it will be our spiritual shroud and sepulchre. Whatever visions we may inherit, we must see God for ourselves, or we shall not see Him at all. Whatever songs and psalms come echoing down the ages, we must hear His voice with our own ears. Our songs must rise out of our own struggles and deliverances, or we shall soon cease singing at all.

¶ The poet, so far as he is a poet, accepts nothing on authority. The truths that he discovers have been discovered by many before him, but what makes them worth the communicating is that now he has discovered them again, reaching them, it may be, by a new track, but in any case by his own efforts, so that they come to him as the crown of his own labours, and the fruit of his own sorrows, and struggles, and joys.[1]

¶ So wonderfully has God fashioned His earth that even the commonest of experiences, read about a hundred times, strike home with a 'surprise of joy' when first they are entertained. The glory of a snow-clad hill; the blue of a southern sea; the purple of a Highland hill—how new they are to each generation. I watched the sunrise the other day. It was very strange. The garments of night rolled to the south; and the rose of dawn spread itself in the east. The feathered creatures, to whom dawn comes daily, strained the hearts of them in such a choir of praise as I have never heard. To them this old experience, come anew, demanded some new song.[2]

2. A new song means *a clear outlook and a brave spirit.* The faith that has no future has no song on its lips, for there is no hope in its heart. The critic who said, 'All the songs have been sung, and all the stories been told,' if he had spoken in sober truth, and not in satiric jest, would have sounded the knell of life as well as of art. Life is never a repetition of past life. Crystals repeat themselves, but living creatures are all 'new creations.' And so long as souls are fresh and new and original, so long will life contain an original element.

God has given us a new time and a future of promise, and He expects that we should sound out of this new time a new song. The children of God ever march breast forward, 'greeting

[1] Walter Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, 11.
[2] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 170.

the unseen with a cheer.' They know that the future is misty and full of dread secrets, but that does not daunt them. If God entrusts to us a future that calls for the same heroic spirit as the past evoked it must not find us nerveless and cowardly. Come what may, we have Him and His everlasting Word to direct, inspire, and reward us there as here.

All songs are not 'songs of degrees, songs of the upward way.' It is the minor key in which many songs are pitched, and some that begin in bright outpourings of hope die ere they are done on lips too weak and pale to finish them. Will God listen to such songs as these? Yes, if they come from a heart of faith. That is the fine element in the Hebrew psalms. Many of them are more like wails than songs; they are sad beyond the scope of any music to express; and that because they came from the hearts of men who were in extremity, and who had no one but God to whom to turn. But that is just their redeeming feature. They rise 'out of the pit'; but they lift themselves to the stars. 'O my God, my soul is cast down within me. . . . All thy billows have gone over me. . . . Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Such a song as that is always a new song to him who can repeat it from his heart, for it betokens a new and unconquerable spirit in him.

Let us remind ourselves that in our songs of praise we only give back His own to God. Our songs are but a response on our part to things as they are. Either they are simply a statement of our appreciation of God's own facts; or they are an expression of our emotions aroused by those facts. Each way, God is the source, as well as the object, of our praise. Indeed, in one sense we but sing God's own song over again. For long ago, when the earth had need of music, God Himself sent out to her the Song of His Love, sung in the matchless music of the Life of Jesus Christ. And we—we have caught its strains. It haunts us. We cannot escape it. We would take it upon our lips and into our hearts and into our lives. And when our lips recount the old, rich story—why, they recount the noblest thoughts we can contain of God; and when our lives are patterned upon His, we tender the loftiest praise in deeds we can attain unto; and when our hearts are held by Him, then we may be sure that not only do we glorify God, but that our praise is acceptable to the Great King. Yes, it was God who so loved the world that He sent His Son. We give Him but His own. Pray God that that, which He has rendered unto us, by us may be rendered to Him again.

The Gospel of the Sanctuary

Ps. xcvi. 6.—'Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.'

1. How far removed from the Divine ideal of 'strength and beauty' is the actual life of many who claim the Name of Christ! Indeed it is the common criticism of the world to-day that those who are Christians are neither strong nor beautiful—a criticism which is too often justified by obvious facts. Here, however, is the answer of the gospel foreshadowed in the Psalms, dimly apprehended in later days in the Prophets, but fully revealed for all ages in Jesus Christ. It is that God plans to make men of His own type, sons of His own likeness. He enjoins holiness, love, truth, the pure heart, upon all who call Him Father. But He also endues men who are strangers to these qualities with the grace for their acquisition. There is strength and beauty in the Sanctuary, for all. Any failure in these respects is, in fact, a failure to realize His plan and His promise. It is a failure in submission to His power, and in surrender to His control.

It is not too much to say that 'strength' and 'beauty' are vital to our peace of conscience. For we know perfectly well what manner of men and women we should be. We do not need more light; for the fact is that we do not walk by the light that we have. If we were living in obedience to what we know, our lives would be entirely changed, our service would have a different record, and God would be reverenced in the beholding world as to-day He is not. What we need is sincerity in relating the light which we have to our own present lives, and to those needs which conscience emphasizes as the Word of God searches us. For only by so doing can we acquire 'strength and beauty.'

2. To what does the Psalmist refer when he speaks of the 'sanctuary'? Not, surely, to any one place of God's worship, however hallowed by association and experience. His

whole conception of God is too spacious and too spiritual to admit of anything so cramped and confining. To attempt to localize the presence of God and the transforming energies of intercourse with Him to any place or ordinance is a contradiction of His nature. Such expressions as, 'Thy courts,' 'Thy pavilion,' 'The secret of thy presence,' 'Thy sanctuary,' may be taken to cover all those secret meeting-places of the soul with God, where in the fellowship which love—both His and ours—demands, all the resources of grace are put at our disposal to meet the needs of which love makes us ever more conscious. In that fellowship there is that which makes the weakest strong, and beautifies the meek with salvation.

¶ 'I've been poking about Zion for near thirty years, a poor limping tramp, let in and tolerated as yet, but I can't but aver that I see nothing but strength and beauty in Zion; green pastures, still waters, strong towers, vines and olives and shady fig-trees, quiet resting places, springs that bubble more and more brightly and spring up like Jacob's well. I am "deluded," am I? But I know as sensible men *in* Zion, as I know out of it, and we compare notes, and must speak as we find. We "can no other." '[1]

The Psalmist's frequent reference to the sanctuary is an interpretation of his own personal history. It is there he finds help in weakness, guidance in perplexity, and light in darkness. It will be remembered that he himself learned this by the various experiences of life. Sometimes he is driven to the sanctuary because his foes are pursuing him. He needs God as a refuge, and finds in Him then that sense of security and protection for which his fears cry out. Sometimes he is driven there by the conviction and condemnation of his own conscience. When his sin takes such hold upon him that he cannot look up he betakes himself to the sanctuary, and there spreads out all his wrong-doing before the One who understands him perfectly and judges him mercifully. Sometimes a sense of loneliness, with which we, too, are all familiar, makes him seek the sanctuary of God for that sympathetic companionship for which his heart craves. Sometimes the weight of responsibility attaching to his office directs him there to seek help and inspiration from God. And so it is variously with us. Anything which drives us into the sanctuary is the minister of God to us.

[1] *James Smetham.*

3. Let us take these two words, 'strength' and 'beauty,' so vital to our peace of conscience and to our witness for Christ, and look into their content.

(1) *Strength.*—There is not one of us who does not constantly experience the humbling discovery that self-strength has its very obvious limitations. It is true that we can do certain things of ourselves; but how soon we come to the end of our own resources! We find ourselves, for instance, set in a world of opposing forces which we can by no means beat back, and over which we can never secure control. We need Divine strength just because life is so great, and the ideals of discipleship so high. It is because we must live the lives of children of God, lives of holiness, purity, truth, as we see them in the Lord Jesus; because our destiny is not bounded by this short life of threescore years and ten, but is eternal; because this present is only part of the vaster unending service and worship to which we are saved and called—it is because of these things that we need the strength of God. It is because life is so great, and its possibilities so unbounded and unmeasured, that we must have the strength which is to be found only in the sanctuary. Otherwise we shall miserably fail.

Now one of the first products of sin is strengthlessness. Take, for example, our weakness of desire. The difficulty with many of us is that we do not always want to be good. Our desires are so uncertain, unequal, and fitful. And that languor of desire, that half-heartedness of moral effort which so handicap us are just the result of sin. But the glorious miracle is that God can repair the ravages of sin, that He can recreate our deteriorated capacities, and endue us with strength which shall enable us to make the future as unlike the past as can be imagined. So He invites us to draw near to Him; to come into the place of worship where 'the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him'; to draw away from those things which have defiled us; to have done with those whose influence is dragging us down; and to prove Him. So the evil effects of sin in conscience, mind, memory, heart, and thought shall surely be repaired.

¶ It is not enough for man to have light. He needs strength. Sin has not only blinded his

mind and deadened his heart, it has also weakened his will. God cannot redeem us merely by showing us the Heavenly Vision. It is the chief tragedy of human life that we see and know and love the good and cannot do it steadfastly. If God had merely given us in His Son the example of a perfect human life, it would have filled us with despair. Like the crippled, hunchbacked child in the art gallery at Versailles gazing at the statue of Apollo and then looking down with tears at his own misshapen limbs and withered muscles, we should have gazed at the perfect example of our Lord's life and then looked down on our futile resolutions and broken promises and withered resolutions, and cried, 'Ah! I can never be like Him!' Christianity is not merely the Gospel of a Good Example. It is primarily the Gospel of Power from on High: of the strength of God coming to reinforce our weakness.[1]

It must be borne in mind, however, that this essential power is not made ours by the supersession, but rather by the reinforcement, of all our own efforts. There is no thought that this strength makes everything but faith unnecessary. If we think that, we have a wrong conception both of the grace of God and of the nature of faith. The Christian life is not for any one of us an ease; it is a stern encounter. Its key-word for every weak and discouraged and downcast life is that 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

(2) *Beauty.*—Another of the obvious products of sin is moral ugliness. All the ugly habits and traits of character which so eloquently refute our Christian profession, all the tempers and dispositions, all the stains and inconsistencies, are the outcome of sin, which is, in its last analysis, just unregulated desire. And this gospel of the sanctuary declares that God can transform character, renew disposition, deal with the central cause of the ugliness, and make us in an ever-increasing degree like unto Him whose name we bear.

There is in every one of us an instinct for beauty which is perfectly legitimate, though its expression is not always worthy, nor our canons of judgment always reliable. For beauty in its essence is spiritual. There is no beauty worth the name in which God has no part. Beauty is holy, as holiness is beautiful. It is the unholy things in life which at once deform us and defame Him. Ruskin has said that there are four things which destroy the beauty of any human face—sensuality, pride, ferocity, and fear. And if this is true of mere physical appearance, it is still more so with regard to the soul. For these are the things which make the lives of professing Christians unlovely—yieldings to the lower instincts; the enthronement of self-will; anger, jealousy, and the like in our attitude towards others; and that consequent haunting fear which makes uncertain all relationship with the love of God and the God of love.

All God's ministry to us—His patient discipline of our lives, His correction of our ignorance and wilfulness, and the rich gifts of His spirit—is directed toward the removal of these ugly things, and toward the replacement of them by the beauty which all the world sees in Christ, our Saviour and Pattern.

Let us always remember that this wonderful gospel is possible to us only because of the unspeakable sacrifice of both strength and beauty in the person of our blessed Lord.

Under an Eastern sky,
Amid a rabble's cry,
A Man came forth to die,—
For me!

In that death of the Lord Jesus we see the surrender of all that is strong and beautiful, and it inspires our undying love. He was crucified in weakness, though by His word the worlds were created. He was crucified as one in whom there was no comeliness, though He is the altogether lovely One. And, just because He relinquished it for us, we may draw near, and continually find that which shall make our lives what God desires them to be, and what the world expects them to be—both strong and beautiful.

Self-Denial in Worship

Ps. xcvi. 8.—'Bring an offering, and come into his courts.'

1. THERE are certain elements present in all true worship. There is, for instance, thanksgiving and praise and a sense of spiritual need. But there is another which the Psalmist touches on here—the element of self-sacrifice—which is

[1] Paul B. Bull, *The Spirit of Wisdom, Love, and Power*, 63.

not less important but is frequently forgotten. Worship is a duty as well as a joy, and to perform it rightly is impossible without a certain measure of self-denial.

The element of sacrifice is seen here in the matter of the money-offering. 'Bring an offering, and come into his courts.' Giving of his means was to every Jew part of his devotions. Of the thirteen boxes in the Temple treasury, four were for the free-will offerings of the people. And this fine spirit of the ancient worship passed over into the worship of the Church, and was enormously deepened and intensified by the new thought of the sacrifice of Christ. It was the glowing thought of all that Christ had given which quickened the poorest to be givers too.

Now, while all such offerings were acceptable to God, and while all brought a blessing to the giver, yet from earliest times it was felt by spiritual men that the true offertory must touch on self-denial. We are told of the abhorrence of King David against offering to God that which had cost him nothing. And we have read of Jesus Christ, and of His judgment upon the widow's mite, and of all the riches that He found in that, because there was self-denial in the giving. It was a wonderful cry that broke from Zacchæus' lips when he came face to face with Jesus Christ. Looking upon Jesus, he cried, 'Lord, I give half my goods to feed the poor.' He had always given in his Jewish way, but now he felt that he could not give enough. We may give as citizens and never feel it, but we do not give in the spirit of Jesus until, like Him, we touch on self-denial, until His love constrains us to some sacrifice, as it constrained Him to the sacrifice of all.

¶ Mr F. N. Charrington, whose mission work in the East End is so well known, narrates the following incident: It has been his custom to provide a free tea every Sunday at five o'clock for seven hundred hungry men and women, at a cost of £20. Recently a farm-labourer's wife wrote to him: 'My husband and I would like very much to send you the money for one Sunday's tea. My husband is a farm-labourer, and after we have taken out God's tenth, we have only 24s. weekly for rent and everything, but I used until last Whitsun to go out to work in a gentleman's house, so I have some money saved in War Savings' Certificates which I can draw. I can manage £17 and my husband will make up the £3.' In his reply, Mr Charrington protested against the greatness of this sacrifice, but the money was sent, and along with it another letter in which the woman said: 'We may never be able to do anything of the sort again, so we shall esteem it a privilege to be able to do so now.'

Gradually as men became more spiritual the thought of self-denial deepened also. It was not enough, if a man were to worship God, that he should bring an offering in his hand. Slowly it was borne in upon the Jew that the truest offering was in the heart. Think of the case of David, a man who had been trained in ritual worship. We may depend upon it that from his earliest years he had never worshipped with that which cost him nothing. He had brought his offering, and he had paid for it, and he had denied himself that he might pay for it. And then there came his kingship and his fall, and the terrible havoc of his kingly character, and David found that all the blood of goats could not make him a true worshipper again. The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. He must give himself—he must deny his lusts—he must lay aside his pride and be a penitent, or all his worship would be mockery. His thought of denial was deepened.

¶ When Madame Guyon was a child, there was in the large garden of the house in which she lived a chapel to the Holy Child Jesus. She records that in the morning she would often eat only half of her breakfast: she would steal out with the remainder, and lay it in a cavity she had discovered behind the image of the Child Christ because she wanted to offer sacrifice to her Saviour. Soon, of course, her little store was discovered and the proceedings stopped. But even if she had gone on for a time offering her childish sacrifices, she would soon have got beyond them as she grew in knowledge and grace. She would have discovered that the reality of the Christian's sacrifice is not in anything external but in the heart and will—its essence in the act and attitude of living, its fragrance in the loving dedication of all life's purposes and powers.[1]

David found there was no blessing in the sanctuary unless his heart was penitent and humble. And this great truth is insisted on by the Lord Christ Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught

[1] J. M. E. Ross, *The Tree of Healing*, 252.

against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.' Observe that His theme is not the patching up of quarrels. He is teaching us what elements are needed if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. And not only does He insist on giving; He insists that at the back of every gift there shall be the self-denial of the heart. It is far easier to give up a coin than it is to give up a quarrel. It is easier to lay down a generous offering than to lay down a long-continued grudge. But if worship is to be acceptable to God, the worshipper must lay aside his pride, and humble himself as a little child. That is hard to do, and it calls for patience, and interior sacrifice, and prayerful, if secret, self-denial.

In the very coming to church Sabbath by Sabbath there must be an element of self-denial. Were a man just to consult his inclination he might seldom come to church. There was a day when he would have lost his good name by staying away; but that day is certainly not the present one. And he is tired when the week is over, and is not the Sabbath day a day of rest? And perhaps he is not feeling very well, and the morning looks as if there might be rain. Not only so, but he may think that he gets more good at home than in the church. If he wants a sermon he has sermons on his shelves, written by the great masters of the heart. All that may be the flimsiest excuse, or all that may be literally true. But in either case what it reveals is this, that natural inclination is not towards the church. So the fact remains that self-denial is needed if one is to be every Sabbath in the sanctuary. The point is that that very self-denial is good for man and pleasing to God. It is a better beginning to the week than the finest sermon in the easy chair. 'Jesus, as his custom was, went into the synagogue.' He was the Son, and heaven was His home, and yet as His custom was He went to church.

2. Passing from the approach to worship to worship itself, let us remember that worship is fellowship. In public worship we are not simply hearers; we are a fellowship of Christian people. We go to a lecture just to hear the lecturer, or we go to the theatre just to see a play. It does not matter who is there beside you—they are nothing to you and you are nothing to them. At the theatre you have an audience; but in the church it is a fellowship of men and women, bound together by their common faith, united by the very deepest things, and loving one another in Christ Jesus. Now, in every fellowship must there not be a certain element of sacrifice? Is it not so in the fellowship of home? In all communion there must be self-denial, and a constant willingness to yield a little, and if that be so in the fellowship of home, it must also be so in the fellowship of worship. Just as a mother loves to deny herself for her children, so in the fellowship of public worship there must be mutual consideration. The young have their rights, but they will not insist on them when they know it would vex and irritate the old. The old have their claims, but for the sake of the young they will welcome what may not appeal to them. A tender regard for others by our side, with the denial that is involved in that, is an integral part of public worship.

The same truth is still more evident when we think of worship as our approach to God. Now it is true that we were made for God, and that in Him we live and move and have our being. It is true that He is not far away from any one of us, yet such is the immersion in the world even of the best that the approach to God with the whole heart demands an effort that is far from light. We may be in church and never know the reality of worship. For we may think our thoughts, and dream our dreams, and be in the spirit a thousand miles away. But quietly to reject intruding thoughts, and give oneself to prayer and praise—that is a task that never can be easy, and for some is incredibly hard. If we want to wander we can always wander. There is nothing here to rivet the attention. It is for ourselves to make the needed effort, and to shut the gates and to withdraw ourselves, and through that very effort comes the blessedness of the public worship of God in Jesus Christ.

The Sovereignty of God

Ps. xcvii. 1.—'The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.'

Ps. xcix. 1.—'The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble.'

THE sovereignty of God is a primal article in our creeds, but to a large extent it has passed out of the category of effective beliefs. And

there is nothing which, in the interests of a deep, virile, serious religion, we need more than to know the power of the truth that 'the Lord reigneth'; that our God is not a dead God, not an absentee God; but a living God, a Sovereign God, a present God, actively engaged in directing, overruling, shaping the affairs of nations and of men.

The texts are taken from the Royal Psalms. The main subject of these Psalms from the Ninety-third Psalm onwards is the sovereignty of God. And the two verses are chosen because they set forth a double result that will follow upon a realization of this truth of the sovereignty of God.

1. *A New Sense of Awe.*—First of all, we shall gain a new sense of awe. 'The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble.' There was a note of seriousness and solemnity about the religion of the Puritan that is all too often lacking in the religion of to-day. It was born of his sense of the sovereignty of God. It has passed away because, to a large extent, that doctrine has lost its hold upon us.

The characteristic of the teaching about God of the past fifty years has been the stress and emphasis laid upon the Fatherhood. We have emphasized what is tender and gracious and benignant in the Divine character. This has been partly, no doubt, in the nature of a reaction against the harsher views that previously prevailed. But, as so often happens, in our reaction from one extreme we have swung right across to the other. We delight in these days to say, 'Gentle, gentle, gentle, is the God and Father'; we have almost forgotten that what cherubim and seraphim, with veiled faces, continually do cry is, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.' There is a verse of a hymn in one of our Hymnals in which the writer says:

> Oh how I fear Thee, living God!
> With deepest, tenderest fears,
> And worship Thee with trembling hope,
> And penitential tears.

That verse is almost foreign to our modern religious experience. God has become to many of us an easy-going, indulgent parent who can be coaxed and cajoled by His children, and who can deny them nothing—*le bon Dieu* of the Frenchman. We need to recover the lost sense of awe; and to create within us that feeling of reverence we need a new vision of God as the Holy Sovereign.

¶ On the occasion of Mr Gladstone's last visit to Oxford, he is said to have sat in the Senior Common Room at Christ Church, and discoursed at large upon the happy changes he had seen come true in the lot of the English people. His outlook was so radiant that it aroused a challenge. 'Are we to understand, sir,' said one, 'that you have no anxieties for the future of the race? Are there no adverse signs?' The old man answered slowly: 'There is, indeed, one thing which frightens me: the fear of God seems to be dying out of the minds of men.'[1]

The Ninety-ninth Psalm is divided into three stanzas, and the last line in each stanza supplies the reason why the thought of the sovereignty of God should fill us with holy fear. 'The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble.' Why? 'Holy is he,' answers the first stanza. 'Holy is he,' answers the second stanza. 'For the Lord our God is holy,' answers the third stanza. Put the two statements together, 'The Lord reigneth' . . . 'the Lord our God is holy,' and what do we get? We get holiness upon the throne. We have only to realize that God is the Holy Sovereign, and the awe is bound to come back. The Puritan's religion was a serious religion. He was afraid of God—afraid of Him in a worthy sense. He conceived of God as with him and about him always, and he was afraid of sinning against His holiness. We are constantly deploring our lack of the sense of sin. Is that due to the fact that we have obscured God's holiness? It may be that the very emphasis we have laid on the tenderness and patience of God's fatherly love has made it easy for men to sin. We have made God's forgiveness so cheap that sin has come to appear a light and trivial matter. If that is so, let us remind ourselves of the holiness of God; let us remind ourselves that this Holy God is on the throne, and that He is on the throne to maintain purity and righteousness.

2. *A Happy Confidence.*—But if, on the one hand, the realization that a Holy God is Sovereign ought to fill us with awe, that same realization of God as Sovereign ought to fill all those who love goodness and long for the triumph of Christ with a happy confidence.

[1] P. B. Clayton, *The Smoking Furnace and the Burning Lamp*, 30.

'The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.' 'God's in His heaven,' sang Pippa as she passed along the streets of Asolo, 'all's right with the world.' 'In His heaven'; that is, not as being absent from the earth, but as being in the place of supreme power and dominion.

(1) Here is the real ground of our confidence *in the coming of a better day*—'The Lord reigneth.' There are many things in the condition of modern society to depress and sadden us. The touching faith men had in the natural and inevitable 'progress' of the race has received many a shattering blow. The one thing that will keep our faith in the coming of the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness undimmed is to believe in the sovereignty of God. For to believe in it is to believe in the strength and supremacy of righteousness. The man who looks out on the world and who can see only Kings and Emperors, and scheming politicians, and armies and fleets all ready to deal out death and destruction may well fall into something like despair. But the man who believes in and realizes the sovereignty of God can be happy and confident.

¶ When the Northern States of America braced themselves for that gigantic struggle on behalf of the freedom of the slave there were plenty of people to prophesy defeat. But there were some men, like Ward Beecher and Whittier and Lowell and the great Lincoln himself, who contemplated the issue with confidence, because they believed they were on God's side, and that God would not belie His own character by permitting the triumph of iniquity and wrong. But, at first, it seemed as if the prophecies of those who foretold defeat were all going to come true. Things went badly for the North, and after one fierce engagement in which victory rested with the South the hearts of the bravest failed them. It happened that a meeting was being held in Washington at the time the news of the defeat arrived. Frederick Douglas, the slave orator, was speaking. The news was brought to the platform, and when he heard it, Frederick Douglas gave way to despair and burst into tears. The news passed from seat to seat through the hall, and as they heard it, the hearts of the people stood still with fear. But there was one old negro woman sitting away in a back gallery whom temporary defeat could not dishearten, and when she saw the meeting falling into something like a panic, and even Douglas in despair, she cried out with a shade of reproach in her tone, 'Frederick Douglas, God is not dead.' It was a simple word, but it brought the courage back to the hearts of all, because it reminded them of Him in whose hand the destinies of nations are, and by whom kings rule and princes decree justice.

(2) 'The Lord reigneth,' this is the ground of our confidence *in the triumph of the Church.* The Church has not, of late years, been in a triumphant frame of mind. She has been depressed, nervous, harassed, anxious. She has been conscious of strained resources and inadequate powers. What we want for a recovery of our courage and confidence is the recovery of our faith in the sovereignty of God. There is a sentence in Dr Paterson's book *The Rule of Faith* which says: 'The value of a religion depends on the truth and sufficiency of its idea of God.' Not only on the truth of it, but on the sufficiency of it as well. If we start with a poor idea of God, we shall have a religion utterly insufficient to meet the better needs and wants of man. For the idea of God is the ground plan in religion. If the ground plan is cramped and meagre, the building erected upon it is bound to be cramped and meagre too. A great religion demands a great God for its starting-point. Now, whatever else our Christian gospel claims to be, it claims to be a *great* religion. It claims the world for its province, and it preaches a salvation that reaches down to the last and the least. But to make it even credible we need a mighty conception of God. At the close of St Mark's Gospel we read: 'Then the Lord was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went . . . everywhere.' The Lord on the throne—the servants out in the field. The Lord in the place of power — the disciples flinging themselves with resistless dash and courage upon all the strongholds of heathenism. And the vision of the King produces exactly the same effect to-day.

¶ 'Do you expect to convert China?' asked the captain of the ship in which Robert Morrison sailed. 'No,' replied that indomitable missionary, going out alone to claim China for Christ, 'but I expect God will.'

(3) It is the realization that God is Sovereign that will bring us *calm and peace amid the varied experience of our individual lives.* Horace Bushnell has in one of his volumes a sermon on

the text, 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known me,' and to the sermon he gives the title, 'Every man's life, a plan of God.' God compasses our path and lying down; He is acquainted with all our ways: He orders our steps. The temptations, the trials, the joys, the sorrows of our lives—they are all of His ordaining. The niche we occupy, the sphere we try to fill, the work we seek to do—they are all of His appointment. 'The Lord reigneth.' And in this fact let us rejoice. For this Lord who reigns—who girds us though we do not know it—is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Holy God, but He is also the loving God. 'Holy Father,' that is His full and perfect name. This is one of the commonplaces of our religion, but it is one of those commonplaces that sorely need to be revitalized. When we come to account for our trials and difficulties and hardships—if we believe in a living God at all—we come ultimately to this: they happen to us because they are God's will for us. But that will is a loving will, a perfect will. Once we realize that, we shall arrive at the Apostle Paul's triumphant faith that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Mystery in Religion

Ps. xcvii. 2.—'Clouds and darkness are round about him.'

1. 'A COMPREHENDED God is no God at all.' A religion without mystery could hardly be *religion*. Yet there are many men who are impatient of 'clouds and darkness,' and demand a religion free of the mysterious—capable of being understood through and through in the cold, clear light of human reason.

Mystery is inevitable; and we do not use the word in its original sense as a secret withheld for a time or something that was disclosed only to the initiate, but in its fullest sense as something which cannot be known at all.

This inevitable mystery is not simply something to be borne as best we can; it is one of the greatest blessings of human life. It forces us into movement and progress. It tests our whole nature: it is the mother and nurse of beauty, of foresight, of struggle, of righteousness itself. If it were possible to strip away all mystery, and lay God and man and the universe cloudless and shadowless under the naked and omniscient reason, there would disappear along with the mystery that which made the movement and interest and progress of man's life—its loveliness and joy, and even its moral worth.

¶ Let us turn to science to illustrate this. Had a secret possessed no power to inflame the curiosity of men, we should never have had a Copernicus, a Galileo, a Kepler, a Newton, a Herschel. Because the silence of the skies was more than man could bear, he set to work to wrest their story from them. The Tower of Babel was the germ from which the Greenwich Observatory evolved. And so man came at length to know the sun and moon, Jupiter and Saturn, as well as London knows Melbourne or Melbourne Hong Kong. The same is true of the strata beneath our feet. The silence of the past was a terrible thing. What had happened on this planet before we arrived here—before our history books began? Here was a secret for you! And that secret teased the imagination of man, until he set to work to dig up the records. With what frenzy of eager enthusiasm he searched for the secret! No prospector hunting after gold at Klondyke or Calgoorlie ever tore up the earth with fiercer zest. His pickaxe shook the planet.

> Beneath the seas he made a stair;
> He laid the primal forges bare;
> He asked if truth were hid
> 'Neath cairn or pyramid;
> He questioned rune and kann,
> And bones as old as man.

And thus, in that passionate quest of a secret, the science of geology was born! And what means all this romantic tale of exploration—these bronzed travellers back from the interior of great continents, these battered ships back from the Poles? It is the same old story. There were secrets! How the secret as to the fountains of the Nile taunted the brain of Livingstone! In the delirium of death he was still babbling of the fountains, the unseen fountains. How the secret of the West tantalized the fancy of Columbus! How the secrets of the snows have lured to their triumphs a great host of Arctic and Antarctic adventurers! If science is a good thing, it follows that a secret is a good thing; for if the world had been challenged by no secrets, it would certainly have been enriched by no science.[1]

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Uttermost Star*, 106.

What is art but just that endless effort of the human heart to capture the elusive and beautiful mystery of the all of things in a net, sometimes of words, as in poetry, sometimes of sound, as in music; sometimes of form and colour, as in painting? The highest poetry is always haunted with this mystery: its very words suggest things 'that break through language and escape'—the dim and lovely soul of being that refuses to be captured in articulate speech.

2. If we find that in things we call secular—delight, beauty, progress of mind and emotion—all spring from mystery, it must prepare us to find the same power of it working in the loftier region of morality and religion. There it creates forethought, patience, duty, righteousness, humbleness, trust, and the crown of all virtues—love. Take the uncertainty of the future: what an endless blessing that is! It is not only that our ignorance frees us from the torment of watching the approach of calamities—it is much more than that: it gives us the power of work and of putting our trust in an Infinite Wisdom to whom the future is clear. And without these two things, work and trust, no high and worthy human life is ever evolved. This is why it is difficult for the very rich to enter the Kingdom—their wealth secures them against some of the most imperious uncertainties of the future. There is no necessity for work, and they often degenerate; there is no urgent need to trust God for men who trust in riches. The poor man, hanging at every moment on an uncertain future, has at least a better chance of receiving the great discipline of work and faith.

Or turn to the great moral problem of this world. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.' But is this statement true? It is not obviously true—not so obviously, not so utterly beyond all doubt, that men are not tempted to live as if it were not true. The mystery of iniquity is very ancient. Wickedness often seems to walk through this world conquering and to conquer, trampling the righteous to the ground; and God keeps silence and makes no sign. This is the ancient mystery in which the race of man walks as in clouds and darkness—a mystery of iniquity and a mystery of righteousness. But without it moral character could not be tried and tested. If every sin brought an immediate stroke of judgment it would be madness to sin. And so the very justice of God suspends its action that the soul of man may be free to make its choice of good or evil. Without the mystery of the Divine justice—this appearance of uncertainty in its judgments—there could not exist that freedom necessary for the soul's probation. And, therefore, moral character, the formation of a love of righteousness apart from fear of consequences, is one direct result of this mystery. And this is at least equally true of the mystery which surrounds the future world—its judgments, and even its existence. For, if we knew definitely that there was a future life, and that in it justice would infallibly be done, there could be no such thing as choosing the right for its own sake with no certainty of reward, no greatness of soul in facing death for some high cause. There is nothing noble to be won without taking risks—all life is founded on this principle. The 'fearful' may not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Death must be a leap in the dark, otherwise courage is impossible.

You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.
For see, . . .
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What's love, what's faith without a worst to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die—
Put such a foil at back, the sparkle's born!

3. Now we come to the great subject of theology—the mystery of God's own being, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ. For, revealed even so, it is still a mystery. Trinity, Incarnation, Spirit, Conversion, Regeneration, Atonement, Resurrection—we use the words, but none knows one thousandth part of what they mean. Every generation of Christians has gazed, wondered, guessed, constructed its little theory, and it is a mystery still. Imagine the greatness of our loss if all mystery in theology were stript away and an infallible guide given who would solve every problem, save us the labour of thinking for ourselves, and tell us exactly what to believe. That degradation of faith is certainly not what God meant. He

never meant our souls to be thus saved from the play of mystery around them—to be defrauded of the great education that mystery gives. For what is faith? Not merely assent to what another says: it is the trust of a child towards its father. The very mystery of the father gives the child's trust a sphere in which to grow. The little child cannot fathom its father's thought, character, motives, work, but the child's faith is not thereby perplexed or dismayed. The father lifts its helplessness into his arms and the child's heart is filled with happy, trustful peace.

So is it with the Eternal Father. Almost infinite spaces of Being lie beyond our present knowledge, but one central truth nothing but trust can teach—that He is the Father, that His name is Love. And knowing that, the clouds and darkness have no terrors for us. The Eternal Love folds us in; and we know that whatever part of the mystery can be revealed to us will be revealed through that childlike faith preparing our souls for it. And thus the mystery of God will remain for ever because no mere creature can ever know all that God is. Yet for ever and for ever our faith will penetrate into that mystery, knowing more and more; and the more we know, rejoicing the more that we can never exhaust the knowledge. The knowledge of God is eternal life, just because it is a knowledge which never can come to an end. Let us wait and watch and work quietly and joyfully until these shadows flee away, and the great mystery deepens into a brighter glory and a more blessed vision.

Lord, my weak thought in vain would climb,
To search the starry vault profound;
In vain would wing her flight sublime,
To find creation's utmost bound.

But weaker yet that thought must prove
To search Thy great eternal plan,—
Thy sovereign counsels, born of love
Long ages ere the world began.

When my dim reason would demand
Why that, or this, Thou dost ordain,
By some vast deep I seem to stand,
Whose secrets I must ask in vain.

When doubts disturb my troubled breast,
And all is dark as night to me,
Here, as on solid ground, I rest,
That so it seemeth good to Thee.

Be this my joy, that evermore
Thou rulest all things at Thy will;
Thy sovereign wisdom I adore,
And calmly, sweetly, trust Thee still.[1]

Our Maker

Ps. c. 3.—'It is he that hath made us, and we are his.'

We individual men and women are here possessing the high dignity and enjoying the rich privileges of a human life on earth, and it is certain that we were not the authors of our own existence. When we consider how we came to be here, there are two stages in the process at which we are constrained to bow in adoration before God as our Maker.

First there is the stage of the origin of the individual soul. When we have learned all that can be taught by the physiologist, there remains the deeper problem of how the spiritual part of us came into being—that wonderful centre of our thoughts, feelings, and purposes to which we are constantly referring as 'I,' and which in reflective mood we call our soul. In the Christian Church opinion has wavered between two views, which are known in theology as the traducian and the creationist hypotheses. The traducian theory, to the effect that the soul is transmitted from the parents equally with the bodily organism, seems to make us materialists in our ideas about ourselves. The majority of Christian thinkers have accordingly preferred the theory that every new soul is brought into existence by an immediate act of the Creator. 'He is perpetually creating souls out of nothing,' it is held, 'and He creates each soul at the moment when the body which is destined for it enters really and properly on its inheritance of life.' Each of us is here because a few years ago God did a new thing in the realm of His creation, and brought into being the raw material of our unique personality.

We are also compelled to think of God as our Maker when we ascend to the origin of the human race. Upon this subject the traditional ideas have been somewhat rudely shaken within the last hundred years. One of the great achievements of the nineteenth century, we are told, is its proof of the high antiquity of the human race. It was formerly supposed that man was created about four thousand years

[1] Ray Palmer.

before the birth of Christ, and it is now said to be an assured result of historical and scientific research that civilized societies existed from five thousand to ten thousand years before our era, and that the infancy of our race lies in dim regions from which we are separated by a hundred thousand or even two hundred and fifty thousand years. Yet, according to the scientific account, man's appearance on the planet is still comparatively recent, as measured by geological standards. We arrive at last, as we travel backward in the dark abyss of time, at a pair who were the progenitors of our human kind, and at the first man. How are we to conceive the manner of the making of the first man? There are several ways of thinking it out. What seems most probable is that the first man sprang from parents of the animal world, but that at this particular stage God put forth the creative power, which is probably still exerted at the beginning of the existence of each individual, and by the infusion of a human soul launched upon its career the species which was to build upon the earth the Kingdom of God. The writer of Genesis conceived of the first man as created by God first forming him out of the dust of the ground, and then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life; and this does not differ in principle from the theory that He laid hold of a pre-existing animal species, and endowed a member of it with a measure of His own spirit. This view agrees with the intention of the Scriptural narrative, and seems more reasonable than the hypothesis that man evolved from the brutes through the operation of natural forces which gradually, and even by accidental variations, improved upon the animal till they had produced a man.

From the consideration of God as Creator two thoughts emerge.

1. *The Responsibility of the Creator.*—If God is our Maker, an important consequence follows. We are entitled to have confidence in Him as one who will have a desire to the work of His hands. Every one takes a special interest in all that bears the impress of himself. A parent has a peculiar fondness for his own children, which makes him sensitive to their needs, and also makes him take a distinctive view of their defects; and this must hold, so far as may be without detriment to His veracity, of the Father of our spirits. It should be difficult, for example, for one who really believes that God is the Maker of the human race to despair of the course of history and of human progress. We may be assured that the God who wrought so great a wonder as the creation of the human race and the preparation of the earth to be its dwelling-place and workshop, when He might, as elsewhere, have left this corner of space unused and tenantless, would not have brought them into existence had He not foreseen that there would be a satisfactory conclusion to the enterprise, and that under His government the human race would one day achieve results which will be worthy of its outfit and redound to the fuller glory of its Maker.

A similar consideration supports our faith in the immortality of the individual soul. The mighty Power which underlies and is at work in the universe has wrought an astounding marvel in bringing us into being, and in placing us in possession of the Godlike faculties which think His thoughts after Him, distinguish between good and evil, and on the whole make and pursue plans which are useful, noble, and beautiful. And we may well believe that the same Power did not intend to put us to confusion by the catastrophe of death, but that He purposes to make it possible to bring to a splendid consummation what has been so wondrously begun in the strange and glorious adventure of a human existence.

¶ 'For myself,' says the Bishop of Birmingham, 'I find intolerable the thought that I might perish and never understand the great mysteries of the Universe, which all my life I have longed to discover. The ground-plan of the Universe is unreasonable if there is implanted in us a burning desire to know its mysteries, and we are none the less fated to perish in ignorance. The scheme of things is equally unreasonable if man's personality is destroyed at death so that all his spiritual achievements are wasted save for such fragments as may survive through his influence on others.' [1]

Again, when we reflect upon our debt to God as our Maker, we may well feel the reasonableness of the Christian belief that God is 'a faithful Creator,' who added to His original benefactions by coming to our succour as a Redeemer. Although the natural endowments which we received from Him in Creation were manifold and splendid, it is also true that there

[1] E. W. Barnes, *Should Such a Faith Offend?* 330.

are in particular two afflicting and oppressing wants, of which man has ever been conscious in moments of self-knowledge. He was by nature incapable of rising to the knowledge of God, and also of understanding his own true character and destiny. And to ignorance was added weakness. He was called upon to live a life in conformity with high demands of duty, but he was weighted by a nature in which there is much of the animal. Most credible, therefore, seems the Christian belief that God, taking pity upon His creatures, enlightened their darkness by the revelation which shined into the world in Jesus Christ, and provided for our moral weakness by the gift of the life and power from on high for which we thank God as the gift of the Holy Ghost.

2. *The Responsibility of the Creature.*—A further consequence is that our Maker has a sovereign claim on our service. The God who created us has rights of property in us, and has a title to our obedience for the execution of His purposes. 'It is he that made us, and we are his'—to do His work. The same idea was repeated by St Paul with a more distinct Christian background: 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' We have absolutely no right to make our self-will, our private interests, our imagined well-being, the rule of our conduct. The insignificant self acts not only sinfully, but even ludicrously, when it sets up its own claims against the will of its Maker. It was the purpose, not only of the coming of Christ, but also of our coming into the world, which is described in the words of the Psalmist: 'Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God.' But what are we to understand by this will of God which we, as His creatures, are here to do, and to assist in getting done? There are many short answers. It is another name for our duty. The will of God is revealed in the Scriptures. And again, the sum of the practical teaching of Scripture is that we should follow Christ. It is not, however, always easy to say what these standards require of us in detail, and most people accept as their rule the average practice of the circle in which they live, or the better tradition of their country and their church. We may get a fresh impression of the will of God by thinking of it in two main aspects, which may be roughly distinguished as the will of God in the realm of Nature and in the realm of grace.

(1) There is a will of God, very definitely exemplified in the Old Testament, which is concerned with this world. It is undeniable that God is largely concerned with interests which we commonly speak of as secular. The earth, with all the utilities and beauties of the animate and the inanimate creation, came into existence because God found delight in planning it, and in translating His thoughts into facts. Similarly, it was the doing of God that the human race was planted on this earth under conditions in which men had to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, and to fight against want, disease, and death; and it was His manifest purpose that mankind should proceed to subdue the earth, to gain dominion over the animals, and to build up a great, rich, and complex civilization. It must therefore be a fundamental duty of the individual man and woman to do something, whether by hand or by brain, which is of real value as a contribution to the every-day work of the world or at least as inspiration to those who do it; and it must be a serious dereliction of duty to pass through life without doing anything of this kind, either to meet present needs or to help on future progress. To be faithful in one's calling, provided only it be a useful calling, is to imitate Christ in one important particular, and it is also the most substantial way in which the average person can fulfil the command that we should show love to one another and bear one another's burdens.

¶ The Force that had been lent my Father he honourably expended in manful well-doing: a portion of this Planet bears beneficent traces of his strong Hand and strong Head; nothing that he undertook to do but he did it faithfully and like a true man. I shall look on the Houses he built with a certain proud interest: they stand firm and sound to the heart all over his little district: no one that comes after him will ever say, Here was the finger of a hollow Eye-servant. They are little texts, for me, of the Gospel of man's Free-will. Nor will his Deeds and Sayings, in any case, be found unworthy, not false and barren, but genuine and fit. Nay, am not I also the humble James Carlyle's work? I owe him much more than existence; I owe him a noble inspiring example. . . . Let me not mourn for

my Father; let me do worthily of him; so shall he still live, even Here, in me; and his worth plant itself honourably forth into new generations.[1]

(2) There is also a will of God, known chiefly from the New Testament. While God has a secular plan in regard to the human race in general, and has used up and may use up many generations in getting His plan set forward, He has not overlooked the higher interests of those whom He required for the mundane tasks. The purpose which lies still nearer to His heart is to regard each individual as an end in himself, to lift him up to a richer life in union with Himself, and to treat the worn-out instruments of time as heirs of eternity. It is His will that here and now we should possess life eternal in the knowledge of Himself, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. 'This is the will of God,' says St Paul, 'even your sanctification.' It is His will that we should rise by faith above the plane, not merely of the animal life but of the self-centred human life, to that in which we are refashioned after the likeness of Christ by looking on His loveliness, and throwing our souls open to the renewing and enabling influences of the Holy Spirit.

Destruction or Conversion?

Ps. ci. 7, 8.—'He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.'

This hundred and first Psalm has been widely taken as describing the attitude of the ideal king. It is, for example, one of the Psalms selected for the King's Accession. And up to a certain point this view of it is quite justified. It does express a real hatred of evil, a desire for personal integrity, a determination to keep court and kingdom uncontaminated, which we may well imitate in our different spheres. 'I will walk in my house with a perfect heart. I will take no wicked thing in hand; I hate the sins of unfaithfulness. . . . A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. . . . Whoso leadeth a godly life: he shall be my servant.'

Judge this by the common standard of a cynical acquiescence in impurity and vice, of an easy-going indifference to the character of our friend, and it stands for a noble ideal. And yet quite definitely it falls short of the Christian standard, nor does it in any sense solve the problem created by the fact that there are in the world slanderers and the proud, the froward and the unfaithful.

'He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.' But he may go on telling lies when he is somewhere else, and the world will not be any better. 'I shall soon destroy all the ungodly that are in the land, yea, that I may root out all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.' This may appear very excellent for the land or the city which is relieved of the inconvenience and the contamination of their presence, but in itself it only changes the scene in which ungodliness works its mischief. The evil will remain; it has not thereby been transformed into anything better. After all, there is only one conceivable way of overcoming sin, and that is by turning the sinner into something else.

There are such things as model villages, and the effort to maintain them does credit to the landlord. He is acting in the spirit of our Psalm; and in fact the desire to enjoy the privileges of a well-ordered community often does a good deal to keep the inhabitants of such a village in the path of outward respectability. But there is another result: when your model villager 'goes wrong' in the popular sense of the term, the notice to quit transplants the family to a neighbouring village; this becomes a dumping ground for the undesirables, and they remain undesirable. Of course, we must be practical. We grant that for their own protection and for the protection of their members, certain institutions such as a school, or a club, are forced to get rid of those whom they cannot assimilate. The expulsion may mean only that the expelled cannot fit in with that particular type of association or discipline. The nation, too, under the conditions of our existing civilization, seems to have no choice but to expel its undesirable aliens, to place its criminals where they will at least be out of mischief, even in the last resort to remove them altogether. And it may be granted that the shock of such punishment may sometimes react upon the conscience of the offender. But this cannot be said to be, under present conditions, either the normal result or the definite purpose of these methods

[1] Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, i. 3.

of getting rid of the sinner. Their primary object is to purge the community, not to convert the sinner. And in many cases we are really moved more by a regard for our own comfort than by a burning zeal for righteousness.

But we must insist upon the fact that this does not solve the problem of the existence of the evil-doer. We are only removing him out of sight so that he ceases to inconvenience us. We are banishing the barrel-organ with its irritating ragtime to a distant street, not teaching the organ-grinder to love better music.

There are various human associations which, rightly or wrongly, feel themselves compelled to admit this method. It may occur to us that there is one form of human association—the family—which can never do so. The family can never be content to wash its hands of even its most abandoned member by expelling him or ignoring his existence. A certain type of Victorian novel, imitated by the modern cinema, is fond of the impressive sentiments 'No more is he a son of mine,' 'Never shall she darken my doors again.' We smile just because we know one cannot destroy the relationship or the responsibility. The father, the mother, the brother, the sister, so long as they remain true to themselves, must seek the lost until they find. This, we know, is the way of Christ, and He showed us that it is also the way of God. It is God's way, just because He is our Father, just because, whether we are useful members of society or not, we are His family. The Heavenly Father cannot get rid of the problem of the sinful child by leaving him to himself or by his destruction. More than this: Christ taught us that He does not need to do so. For He taught us that there is in very truth no bound to the power of love if we will only trust it and try it to the uttermost. We set ourselves once again to fathom the meaning of the Cross. Surely behind all the various theories and theologies which have grown up round it, we see two fundamental principles.

The first is Christ's way of dealing with sin. He is convinced that there is no other way which can be effective in the long run but the way of self-emptying love. Mark the contrast, 'He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.' This is the obvious and easy solution. It is the solution of the Pharisee in Jerusalem, of the Brahmin in India, of the respectable man in England. But 'this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.' Christ's method is the only one which goes to the root of the problem. He had the insight to see the spark of goodness in the outcast, the sympathy to fan it into a flame. He had the long-suffering love which was ready to wait, refusing the easy short cut of ostracism or destruction. And He would follow this road to the last, to Gethsemane, to Calvary.

That is Christ's way of dealing with the sinner. The second principle revealed by the Cross is that it is also God's way. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.' Again, there are manifold discussions, and perhaps more than one possible theory, as to how God was in Christ, as to the method of the Incarnation. But the fact is crucial. The ultimate question is this: Does the love which we see in the death on Calvary represent a futile and unavailing protest against a hard unloving universe, against a system in which force has the last word? Or does it unveil to us the fundamental principle at the heart of the universe? When we see the love of Christ, do we also see the love of God? Is love in truth the one strong thing in the world of spirits? Is God prepared to trust it to the uttermost? Is He the Father who seeks until He finds? We must in this matter trust our insight into what is highest and truest, an insight which has been quickened by the teaching of Christ Himself. The love of God is not a love with a time-limit.

It is probably true that many of the middle-aged, and nearly all the young, are prepared to-day to do lip service to this principle that love is the only real omnipotence, and to apply it more or less consistently in their thinking about God. This is all to the good. But are we prepared to apply it in our dealings with one another? Let us go back to the root of things of which we were speaking before. We may be teachers, we may be responsible in various ways for the exercise of discipline. We get rid of the difficult subject and we breathe a sigh of relief —'Thank goodness, I am not responsible for him any longer.' Are we sure? Can we read the Gospels, can we talk glibly of the supremacy of love, and remain content with a solution which only ensures that the offender ceases to trouble us? Or are we altogether at ease about our penal system? In the stage so far reached by the nations, police and legal punishments cannot

be dispensed with. But when society has shut an offender within four walls, it has not divested itself of any further responsibility. The process does not even succeed in rooting out evil-doers from the city. That great strides are being made in the whole matter of prison discipline, and especially in the treatment of the young offender we thankfully recognize. But public opinion needs to be stirred more deeply on this question, and progress will only be made by those who, whether or no they adopt the name of Christ, yet believe passionately in His principle that love which seeks unweariedly will in the end find.

¶ From 1912 to 1918 there was carried on in Dorset a certified reformatory with the title 'The Little Commonwealth.' The Superintendent was Homer Lane—a born educationalist. Very interesting are the stories of the methods he used. This is the story of Tim:

Tim was fifteen years old and a burglar, and he was committed by the Court to the Little Commonwealth. Tim, Tim's mother, and Mr Lane retired to the ante-room, and Mr Lane determined to aim a shrewd blow at those feelings of defiance and hatred which had been accumulating in Tim's mind for years. '"Look here, old man," said I briskly, "take your mother home and come down to the school to-morrow. There's a train at nine o'clock, and another at one, from Paddington. Book to Evershot. I've got to meet the one o'clock train. If you come by that, you can drive over from the station with me; if you come by the early train, ask the way. Don't forget the station—Evershot." And I gave him a sovereign for his railway ticket.

'Tim's manner was a study during these instructions. At first he was suspicious. As I went on, and he realized that he was not to be "taken away," he looked amazed; when I placed the money in his hand, he looked incredulous. I turned away towards the door immediately, but I saw him look at his mother and I saw her astonished expression. The boy seemed to wilt; his muscles relaxed; he shifted from one foot to the other; he licked his lips and sniffed nervously. As I turned away, freeing him from the authority of force and mistrust and harshness, the true authority took him in charge. My hand on the door, I heard him say in a lovely, tender voice, "Come on, mum!" and saw him put his arm through hers and draw her towards the door. The expression on both their faces showed that many associations in the unconscious mind had that day been dissolved.

'When the one o'clock train from Paddington reached Evershot the next day, Tim alighted. As I greeted him he grinned cheerfully, and handed me some small change left after buying his ticket, saying: "The ticket was sixteen and sixpence halfpenny." I counted it and put it in my pocket, the lad watching me the while. "Right-o," was all I said. This little scene about the money was an important part of Tim's release. Boys do not like to be treated carelessly.'

A schoolmaster discussing Lane's methods with him argued that it was Lane's personality that brought the boy to the reformatory. Lane replied that he always brought boys by the same method, and it never failed. There was some quality in boy nature which responded to confidence and trust. '"That's your personality or gift or genius, or whatever you may call it," the schoolmaster replied. "Besides, it is partly luck that he came as you directed. Now, if I had given him a sovereign and said, 'I trust you to go down alone,' the chances are that he might still be smashing things up in London."

'"I didn't say a thing to him about trust," said I.

'"But you did trust him."

'"Yes, but had I told him so, he would have known that I didn't, and then he would not have come. When one says to another, 'I trust you,' it implies doubt."'[1]

Or let us turn our eyes to the wider field of international relationships. Harsh experience is proving to us that force and conquest, however necessary and justifiable as a stage, solve no problem. Whatever you may do with your village or your club, you cannot purge the world of nations of those which may at the moment seem to be its undesirables. Here beyond all, and hardest of all, it remains to try the other way, the way of the family. Our politics, our opinion of the persons concerned, will differ, but we can unite in the prayer that in the relations between the jarring countries of the world the way of reconciliation may be sincerely tried. We and they have a common Father; whatever the faults of the past, brotherhood remains.

[1] Homer Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 171.

¶ One of the lessons that Shakespeare teaches us in *Romeo and Juliet* is the reconciling power of love. The play opens with the enmity of Capulet and Montague. Their feud is the cause of constant quarrelling. It descends even to the servants. Yet when love is born, everything goes down; every barrier is broken; every wall of partition is removed.

What experience could not do; what the counsels of old age could not accomplish; what the command of authority was powerless to achieve, love did, and did triumphantly. And then one thinks of Somebody who died for us and lives, and who in a world of bitter separations, says, 'Children, have you tried the way of love?'

In Verona it was not an idle dream—the power of love to break through all that separates. Men saw the old antagonisms swept aside there by the mighty tide of love. One wonders why it should be an idle dream, in a world which is but Verona writ large, and which teems with Capulets and Montagues.

Everything else has been tried and has failed; all has been lacking in a uniting power. Men thought that commerce and common interests would unite men—and then the Great War came. Why not listen to the voice of Him (whom the old friar of Verona loved), who is still among us, and still saying softly, 'Children, have you tried the way of love?'[1]

In public affairs and in private alike there are always the two ways. 'I shall soon destroy all the ungodly; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.' 'This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.' Christ on Calvary showed us once for all which is the really kingly, which is the more effective in conquering sin; He showed us too which is the way of God in dealing with His children—our brothers.

What might be done if men were wise—
What glorious deeds, my suffering brother,
Would they unite
In love and right,
And cease their scorn of one another.

Oppression's heart might be imbued
With kindling drops of loving-kindness,
And knowledge pour
From shore to shore
Light on the eyes of mental blindness.

All slavery, warfare, lies, and wrongs,
All vice and crime might die together,
And wine and corn
To each man born
Be free as warmth in summer weather.

The meanest wretch that ever trod,
The deepest sunk in sin and sorrow,
Might stand erect
In self-respect
And share the teeming world to-morrow.

What might be done? This might be done,
And more than this—my suffering brother!
More than the tongue
E'er said or sung,
If men were wise, and loved each other!

[1] G. H. Morrison, *Christ in Shakespeare*, 139.

Unfinished Lives

Ps. cii. 24.—'I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.'

This Psalm has a very beautiful heading: 'A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.' The afflictions are those of the nation and of the Psalmist himself, who added to his own sorrows the sorrow of his people. It seems to have been written towards the close of the exile in Babylon. The author has known sorrow and tears as one of the homeless people, and has shared all the misery that came upon Israel. The keenest pang is that the City of God sits like a widow with her hair in the dust.

It is not possible to disentangle the elements of personal sorrow of which the Psalmist speaks from this general sorrow which he has with all who loved Zion. The elegy moves with mournful strains as he describes the bitterness of his pain. He has eaten ashes like bread and mingled his drink with weeping. His days are shortened, his strength wasted, and death has crept up close to him, so that he is withered like grass. It seems to him so untimely, so premature that he should be taken; for he is assured that God is about to remember Zion and have mercy upon her. The time is near when those who take pleasure in the stones of Zion and love her very dust will have glorious opportunity for rejoicing. For himself, however, his strength is ebbing out as the expected consummation approaches; and there breaks from him the

pathetic cry, ‘ O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.’ He feels his life is unfinished. He has sown in tears, but it is not for him to reap in joy.

1. We, too, have often a similar feeling about what we call unfinished lives and untimely deaths. We have this sense of pathos not for the victor of a hundred fights, but for the soldier who falls in his first campaign; not for the man who can say after a strenuous and long life, ‘ I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course.’ Pity to him is an insult. He has lived out his life and done his work, and entered into his rest. It may be hard for those who loved such a man and leant on him for wisdom and direction, but for himself it is a blessed and expected end. We do not feel this pity at the passing away of the old, in the fullness of time. The real pathos is the untimely death, the premature disaster, the unfinished life where the tale has not been fully told, but broken off abruptly in the middle. There is little or nothing to show for it all, for the years of preparation, for the training and the planning and the first trial of the practice of life. We feel there has been miscarriage somewhere, a great waste of power. This tragedy is common enough—the eager brain stilled ere it has done its thinking; the tuneful heart stopped ere it had uttered its melody; the busy hands lying quiet ere they had done their work.

We are oppressed with the thought of the irony of human life and of the vanity of human wishes at the sight of all unfinished work—the manuscript with the sentence broken off where the pen fell from the fingers, the picture with here and there a figure only sketched in charcoal, the statue with only suggestions of the beauty that was designed by it.

¶ Mrs Joseph Conrad has told of her husband’s efforts to complete his last novel, *Suspense*, before death overtook him; writing laboriously hour after hour, and as he wrote, reading aloud so that the story could be typewritten at the same time. The most notable of such instances of uncompleted work is that of Charles Dickens and the fragment of his novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. It was to have been printed in twelve instalments, of which five had appeared; and Dickens was writing the sixth. It was a beautiful June day, and he was describing such another in Rochester: the brilliant morning shining on the old city, with its antiquities and ruins, its ivy gleaming in the sun, and the light that glimmered from the waving trees, the songs of the birds and the scents of the fields and gardens penetrating the Cathedral and preaching ‘ the Resurrection and the Life.’ He wrote how the ‘ cold stone tombs of centuries grew warm; and flecks of lightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings.’ He left the chapter unfinished when he rose from his writing to go to dinner; but the dinner was never eaten, and instead, having said his last words, his voice on earth was for ever silent, his book for ever incomplete; as if the Resurrection and the Life, of which he had been writing, had touched him with some unrecognized anticipation of his hurrying fate.[1]

But unfinished work can never be half so sad as unfinished lives. For one thing, a man is not judged by the one work he may have left unfinished. Michelangelo left unfinished work, as indeed most artists have done, but we do not think of these when we estimate his work. We pass by the unfinished work to consider the work actually accomplished. But an unfinished life has no such other reference to offer. It stands in all its naked incompleteness, a seeming failure, with no complete meaning.

2. But in all this natural train of thought we are liable to fall into a great and grievous error. We may have a wrong standard of judgment as to what is a finished life. We think of it mostly as length of days, the telling of a long tale. Bulk and size are our common measure in this as in most things. A long life may be an unfinished life, though it has run out to the last sand undisturbed. It may be unfinished in all the essentials of true life, without having secured or attained or even once touched man’s chief end. Life is more than mere existence. It may stretch out far beyond the threescore years and ten, but that too is vanity unless there be more in it than mere length of days. Remember that our Lord, who said at the end, ‘ It is finished,’ with a depth of meaning that could be applied to no other human life, died a young man. That itself is a lesson and a warning to us when we speak of an untimely death and a premature end. Extent of life empty of moral significance is nothing and less

[1] J. M. M. Gray, *Concerning the Faith*, 71.

than nothing. And, on the other hand, can we not enter with some sympathy into the new measure of time which made a Psalmist declare, 'A *day* in thy courts is better than a thousand'?

Human life cannot be judged by its years or even by its works; it must be judged by its spirit. Not the palpable and outside, such as the years passed or the deeds accomplished, but what is attained through the time and through the deeds, the true set of the character, the bent of the life, the discipline of the heart, the culture of the soul.

¶ Sir Thomas Browne, in a letter to a friend about a young man who willingly left the world at an age when most men think they may best enjoy it, brings out in his own fine way the distinction between a truly finished and an unfinished life. 'He that early arriveth unto the parts and prudence of age is happily old without the uncomfortable attendants of it; and 'tis superfluous to live unto grey hairs when in a precocious temper we anticipate the virtues of them. In brief he cannot be accounted young who outliveth the old man. He that hath early arrived unto the measure of a perfect stature in Christ, hath already fulfilled the prime and longest intention of his being: and one day lived after the perfect rule of piety is to be preferred before sinning immortality.'

¶ Some years ago, a minister, known to me, returned to his first charge in the north. A message reached him that a young woman lay dying, and desired to speak with him.

'Do you remember,' she said, 'preaching a sermon on the words, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"' *She* remembered, and continued, 'I live on that word. I am only thirty years of age, and I am dying. The sands of my life are nearly run out, but,' she added, with a look of ineffable contentment and peace, 'I thank God; I have had my twelve hours.'[1]

If a man has learned to love God and obey Him, if he has submitted his will to the will of God, if he has linked his life to the Eternal Life and his love to the Eternal Love, his life is not unfinished though it seem taken away in the midst of his days. There can be nothing untimely when his times are in God's hands. But life out of God, what is it at the best, at the last, but incomplete, unfinished, open at every point to the doom of decay and death, like stubble that blackens on the sodden earth? The end of such life without spiritual contents, without God, is always untimely, always premature.

[1] W. Ross, *Till He Come*, 107.

Unkindled Embers

Ps. ciii. 1.—'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.'

The metrical version of the Psalm gives us the fuller meaning of this verse:

O Thou my soul, bless God the Lord;
and all that in me is
Be stirred up his holy name
to magnify and bless.

The psalms in metre may occasionally fail as poetry; but they never fail in spiritual discernment. The prose reads: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.' We might read those words again and again, feeling in each case that it is merely a devout utterance of the soul, having nothing individual or characteristic about it. But the metrical version cuts down to the root of the idea. It was pure spiritual genius to bring out that idea of 'stirring up' all that is within our souls.

1. We must admit that what most of us need is not to be told more of what we ought to believe or what we ought to do. We know that almost too well. It is not information we need, not proofs, not advice. What we need is that 'all that is within us' should be stirred up. We all of us have within us such material as would make saints and confessors and apostles and martyrs of us: what we need is the element of wind and fire.

Is there even *one* of those things which are vital and central to Christian faith which we do not know? We know that we are sinful men. We know that if God were strict to mark iniquity none of us would stand. We know that if it had not been for some Gracious Influence coming between us and our own actions or our own thoughts or our own imagination at times: if our actions had always been followed by their proper consequences, and if our thoughts, our tempers, our feelings had been allowed to become actions and a general course of life—we know that we should all of us soon or late have sunk to the bottom as a stone sinks in the sea. And

then we all know that Christ will save us if we will only allow Him. We all know well enough that there is something about Jesus Christ which makes it impossible for us to do certain things if at the same time we are thinking about Him. If we allowed Jesus Christ to come into our hearts everything would be very different. And then we all know that one day we shall leave this world, with which meanwhile we are all so much taken up. We know that we have but a leasehold tenure of life, and that the lease is daily running to its term. We know that everything will go—for us—except God and our immortal spirit.

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Once again, we know that if we human beings are bound for anywhere, if life is not merely a senseless, unconnected thing, like the dancing of so many flies on a summer day for whom the evening brings the chill of death, we all know that if we are bound for anywhere it is for the presence of God; that if we are meant for anything it must be for His service and His glory; that therefore, on the morrow after death, we must look to stand before Him while He reckons with us. In fact, we all know the great living facts and truths of faith and life.

2. Why is it, then, that we are only what we are? What lack we yet? The true answer is a very simple one. You heap up coals upon a dying fire and leave it. After a little if you return and find it drowsy what will you do to bring back life? You will do what the Psalmist appeals to his soul to do for itself: you will stir up all that is within it. You will thrust the iron into the heart of it and break up the crust which was slowly crushing it to death. It seems an extraordinary thing that a fire can die, not for want of fuel, but through its abundance of fuel. It may seem extraordinary that a man's religion may die out, not because he has not sufficient religious knowledge and religious facts, but because he has too much or too many of them; or rather, because they are unkindled, because the central fire, the man's true need of God, is not kindling his religious knowledge and all his religious practices.

Many of us must know what the mood is against which the man in this Psalm is protesting. It is not that we have fallen into religious doubts—although, unless we take care, it will come to that. It is not that we have a kind of hankering after things that are wrong or inconsistent with our obedience to Christ. It is not that we do not know the great Christian doctrines concerning God and concerning our duty. We know all those things about God, about His great patience with us, about His great love for us, about Christ, His great happiness in His Father, the glorious peace of His Cross, like the calm of mighty waters. Indeed, we know everything. But we are not *alive* with all these things. We have lost the spirit of praise. We do our duty in a dull, determined kind of way. We would walk miles in obedience to a commandment. Indeed, we are in that strange condition when the Law is easier for us than the gospel; when we can obey, but when our soul will not, and simply cannot, 'bless the Lord.' This is the condition of the lonely man who in this Psalm cries out—with the hope of awakening himself, and making himself alive unto God—

O Thou my soul, bless God the Lord;
and all that in me is
Be stirred up his holy name
to magnify and bless.

3. Is there any way by which the things of faith which seem so far away can again have a living effect upon us? If we read the whole Psalm carefully, we shall find almost all that we need to enable us to deal with ourselves. For, in the first place, these are matters in which 'the patient must minister to himself.' In the second place, we must do something.

(1) It would be well for us if we would take more to heart the sinfulness of certain states of mind into which we fall. We blame ourselves and repent before God for doing wrong things or saying wrong words; but we do not so readily charge ourselves with our sinful and unlovely tempers. And this mood, when we are sullen and unwilling; when we are without gratitude, without happiness; when our heart has no generous overflow; when the morning brings no thrill of new purposes, and the evening no happy sense of good work done; when our very religion has become a stiff and troublesome thing

—this mood is one that it is a heinous sin for us not to protest and cry out against.

¶ That great Christian, Dr Dale of Birmingham, tells us that towards the end of his life he began to ask God to forgive something for which he had never asked forgiveness before. He asked God to forgive him for the sin of gloom. He felt that his face had been gloomy, and that his voice had been gloomy, and he wanted forgiveness for the gloom that had overshadowed his life.

(2) And, in the second place, we must do something, and not sit idly under it. What the man did who suffered from it in the Psalm is worth noting and copying. He chid his soul for forgettting the many things God had done for him. We are all of us like spoiled children in this: we are so ready to forget long days of good things the moment we are crossed by some small thing. The man in the Psalm began by trying to make himself a little ashamed of himself. Then, further, he set himself to take a wider view of life. He began to recall history —to read the footprints of God through the ages.

¶ 'Think and Thank' was the motto on the family crest of Sir Moses Montefiore, the lamented philanthropist. Indeed the two words, differing only in one vowel, have the same derivation. In the old Anglo-Saxon, 'thankfulness' means 'thinkfulness'; the thinking, recalling, remembering of our blessings in such a way as to be moved to gratitude. It is our duty to remember. We cannot remember all His benefits, but we certainly ought not to forget them all. It is because we are not more thinkful that we are not more thankful. If we think we cannot but thank.

Then the Psalmist lifted up his eyes towards the heavens. He saw the hosts of the stars; he saw them as the faithful and willing servants of the great majestic God: 'Ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.' Thus he mused and mused, until the fire burned. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.'

God's Benefits

Ps. ciii. 2.—'Forget not all his benefits.'

Gratitude is the great Christian motive; it is the only right way to think and feel. When we think rightly we become more and more aware of all there is in life for us to be thankful for. The great question is what we choose to think about. We very often select the painful and disagreeable thing; we brood upon our troubles; we fear the troubles that do not yet exist and never may exist. We brood over pleasure and blessings either that we have never had, or that we have not got as yet. Such brooding makes men sullen. But when we are brooding we are living among shadows and unrealities, among things that are not. We do not, as Christians, ignore the sorrows and anxieties that so darken life for many among us, but we do want to remember also that the good things in human life are really good, and that there are many of them. This is the religious exercise of thanksgiving. It has been said that petition is the lowest form of prayer, and praise the highest. Thanksgiving comes between these two. Petition is apt to be all concerned with ourselves and our own needs. Praise loses itself in the glory of God. Thanksgiving is prayer emancipated from self, and yet human; glorying in the light of heaven, and yet remembering and standing upon the solid earth.

William Law, the mystic, asks the question, Who is the greatest saint? His answer is that it is not the man who prays most; it is the man who is most thankful. To live under a deep sense of our infinite indebtedness to God is to enjoy a fellowship with Him as wonderful as it is enriching. And one cannot but feel that there are many longing for larger spiritual experience who are inwardly impoverished by ingratitude. Gratitude is the inspiration of the Christian life. It sends a man forward on to the second mile. It impels him always to go a little farther. It was when longing for a fuller life and for a larger fellowship with heaven that the Psalmist called upon his soul to 'forget not all his benefits.'

And yet he writes like a man who had had his experience, and whose experience had been severe. But, wonderful to say, the experience had not made him sad. As he looked back upon his life his one sure conviction was that the Lord his God had been with him all the way.

¶ One great secret in seeing scenery, says Dr Stalker, is often to look back. You may be ascending an Alpine path, with great walls of mountain on either side shutting out the view, and in front of you all day there may be nothing but a snow-clad, towering height; but, after you have ascended for some time, turn

round and look back, and probably you may find that you can see over the tops of the mountains which have been shutting out the view to great valleys beyond, while round the horizon the mountains are glowing in the sunset. Now, in life also it is a great secret often to look back, and it will frequently be found that those passages that have appeared the dullest and darkest as we have passed through them are in the retrospect glowing in the light of God.

First of all, there is the *negative* form of thanksgiving. We can be thankful for a great deal that we are not, for many things that have not happened to us. There never can be a situation that might not have been ever so much worse than it is. The Pharisee, when he thanked God that he was not as other men, had something to justify him. We see people around us weaker in body and much more miserable in mind than we are. It is surely right for us to be profoundly thankful that we are not as those. If, indeed, we acquiesce in the sad condition of others, it is very different. It is wise even in our penitence to mingle a note of thankfulness. The most faulty of us might have been more faulty still, and has been kept back from many sins.

¶ 'Every misery I miss,' says old Izaak Walton, 'is a new mercy, and therefore let us be thankful.'

Then there are *positive things* that we are apt to overlook because we are so accustomed to them. If they came rarely, and after lengthy intervals, how vividly we should appreciate our mercies. But they have been with us, like the stars of heaven, ever since the hour when we were born, and that is why we often have no eyes for them. The Psalmist was keenly alive to that great peril, and he guards against it in a rigorous way. He deliberately enumerates his mercies. One by one he draws them into consciousness, making them pass before him in procession, till he realizes at last how much he owes. It is so easy to count up our grievances. We are all adepts at *that* enumeration. But to make a quiet addition of our blessings is one of the great secrets of the saints. When we do it, we feel like Sir Thomas Browne, who, looking back on the way that he has travelled, says, 'My life is a continuous miracle of thirty years.'

¶ A few years ago there was published a record of the family life of good Bishop Moberly, of Salisbury, and very aptly it was called 'Dulce Domum.' There are sorrows written in it, the deaths of loved ones, and a fair share of life's disappointments and failures, but it is a book of life's summers—not one of them forgotten—it breathes the richness and fragrance of summer. He lay dying at last—the good Bishop—in July 1885. 'Joyful songs seemed uppermost in his mind—"Sing unto the Lord," he murmured, "O be joyful in the Lord."' He passed as the day dawned—'What a glorious summer morning it was! The birds in full chorus, the sweet flowers, the colour of the blue sky! The morning psalm was "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning"'; and when he passed, his loved ones sang the Te Deum together, and a daughter put a red rose of remembrance on his shoulder.[1]

Often, again, we forget God's *benefits* just because they are so *freely given.* The most wonderful things are the things we never toiled for: they are ours in the free grace of heaven. Things that we get for nothing we despise. They are not half so precious as the things we toil for. The book we have bought with a little self-denial is always the book we glory in, and prize. And one deep reason why we are all so apt to make light of the benefits of God is just that they are so often given for nothing. *Not* by our conscious toil does our eye acquire its marvellous power of seeing. *Not* by our deliberate labour is our ear opened to the world of sound. We do not earn the glory of the spring, or the wealth and beauty of the summer, or the song of birds, or the wonder of the wild flowers. Love must be given, we can never purchase it; and love is the greatest thing in all the world. No effort of ours gave us the home of childhood or the watchful care of father and of mother. These things, and a thousand things like these, are given in the largesse of the Father, and in their very freeness is their peril. We never forget what costs us a great deal. We easily forget what costs us nothing. And God's thousand mercies cost us nothing. They are showered on us by a love that never wearies. That is why, with David and the saints, we have to practise the art of recollection, and forget not all His benefits.

Nationally, too, there is a great deal of cause

[1] George Shillito.

for thankfulness. We are apt to grumble, and to deplore the public evils of our time, as people have done in every generation since time began. Yet side by side with the evils of to-day there are the great experiments in living which are being tried, and there are endless chances of betterment to which noble minds and souls are pledged. It is an age full of magnificent opportunities offered to every man for the public advance towards the better days. No Christian could possibly advocate a sleek contentment with the life and conditions of the present time, but any Christian is likelier to help the present time to be better if he approaches the subject with a happy and thankful spirit. These things may seem secular, but the fact is that nothing remains secular when we are thanking God for it.

Below all these there are the *eternal things of Christ's gospel*, and these are surely a cause for thankfulness we have never yet exhausted. Do we really believe that Jesus Christ lived and died? Is it true that Jesus Christ lives for ever, to be our Friend and Redeemer? Is it true that He is rescuing men everywhere from the evils of their own hearts? Is it true that this mortal life is but one swiftly flying hour embedded in a vast eternity of blessedness which is actually promised to all the redeemed? If these things be true, then why not rejoice thereat? And yet that is only the beginning of the great and shining truth. St Paul went much further than this when he spoke of rejoicing in tribulations. To rejoice in tribulations is an ideal that seems too much for most of us, but it should not be. It is very wonderful how patient we may become if we choose. For Christ's sake, suffer the little bit of society that is most difficult and trying for you; it is a novel experiment in the art of living, but it is a way in which we may really deal with life. If circumstances have gone against us, let us be courageous enough to rejoice in their challenge. God will back every man who will set himself to turn sorrow into joy and difficulty into triumph.

There is another thought—almost too daring and too sacred for our minds to grasp—God's gratitude to us. That is indeed amazing. Yet, if we can reach it, it will surely shame us. Jesus said to His disciples: 'Ye are they that continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom.' Surely that is gratitude. God says at the last, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' When you give a cup of cold water to one of His little ones God is grateful for it, whether the little one is or not. There is nothing that we know about Jesus Christ more characteristic than His immediate response to kindness. There is not a service for which He does not give us His incomparable gratitude. Let us then enter His courts with thanksgiving, and like the Psalmist, call upon our soul to forget not all His benefits.

The Father's Heart

Ps. ciii. 13, 14.—'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he remembereth that we are dust.'

The first intuition of man is the key to his latest and highest philosophy. It is pointed out by Max Müller that among all races, whether Aryan or Semitic, the first name for God was Sky-Father—the source of Light, the fountain of Fertility, the overbrooding Beauty of the World. Ages have passed since the Aryan races separated to travel north, east, south, west. They have formed many languages, they have founded many empires and philosophies; they have grown older, they may have grown wiser and better; but to-day when they make search for a name to express both love and awe, the infinite and the finite, they can but do what their first fathers did when gazing into the sky and feeling the presence of One who is 'as far as far and as near as near can be'—they can but utter the primeval prayer in that form which will endure for ever, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

1. The word 'Father' had meanings for the Psalmist which it did not have when first it was heard in the morning of the world. In the Psalmist's experience God was a pitiful, loving, sin-forgiving Father. He looks back in his history, and counts up the 'benefits' he has received: forgiveness and healing, solace and renewal, quickening and uplift. He is swayed by the spirit of praise and adoration and love; and out of his own growing affection there leaps up irresistibly this thought of God. It must be so. The God who meets his sin with such

pity and pardon, bears with his errors and guilty ignorance so patiently, must have the heart of a father.

As life has deepened the word 'Father' has deepened. As the human heart became more tender, that word became a repository of a profound and unutterable tenderness; so that when it fell from the lips of Jesus it had echoes which the earlier times did not hear. Ages of sorrowful and sweet experience have emptied into it, filling it with the noblest treasures of human thought and human dream. The human pilgrimage has been a long Emmaus walk, with hearts burning by the way. Life is thus a revelation, and, if we read it aright, it is a perpetual disclosure of the Divine. For, as the best man is at his best as a father, so it is with God, the Father Almighty.

¶ Years ago as a boy I heard George Adam Smith preaching in Edinburgh. The sermon has all flown, save this one illustration. He told us how a trawler had put out from Aberdeen, and in wild weather a tremendous sea swept away the skipper's laddie from before his very eyes. And in that dreadful moment, when for an agonizing second he saw his boy's arms stretched out appealingly to him who could do nothing, ere the white snarl of boiling waters dragged him down, I understood, he said, for the first time the meaning of a verse that I had known from childhood, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'[1]

The principle upon which Christ acted is that the God whom we worship must have the same moral standards as those which we find within our own breasts. The position is summed up admirably by Whittier in his famous saying, that

> Nothing can be good in Him
> Which evil is in me.

There is only one kind of goodness, and goodness in heaven is of a kind with goodness on earth; one with the goodness we know in our noblest hours or in the noblest men; like that, only unspeakably more perfect—the same in ethical quality, however it may differ in depth and degree. There are not two kinds of justice. Justice, mercy, and truth in man are in the same category with justice, mercy, and truth in God, although in Him they have inexhaustible richness which we have never guessed, much less explored. Therefore, by an inevitable logic of life and faith, the noblest, purest, truest Man the world has known is the highest revelation of God that man may know on earth, or needs to know. Such is the gospel of Christ, the heart of it, the whole of it, forasmuch as His life of love revealed the heart of God—for love is the highest thing in man and the deepest thing in God.

¶ One of Principal Rainy's daughters writes: 'To us he was just "Father." I suppose most children begin by thinking their father the most wise and strong and tender of beings, and with us that went on to the very end, with an almost increasing sense of how unusual *such* wisdom and strength and tenderness were. For myself, it is to him I owe all my earliest ideas of what the Fatherhood of God might mean. They all came translated to me so inevitably, so securely, through that dear and familiar medium that never once failed me all my life—never once came short of my hopes or my needs. And it was so with us all. I remember how a sister once wrote to me, "I know you read the thirteenth verse of the 103rd Psalm as I do—'Like as *my* Father pitieth his children'—and that means just everything."'[1]

2. No one can define Love, yet all of us know what it is. As a child our hearts went out unquestioningly to the faces that bent over us in tenderness. As young men and women our spirits awoke to that enchantment of love which no piled-up years can ever make us forget. As life deepened we felt the tug of new ties, new solicitudes, binding us to the little ones who came to hallow our home. How our hearts stand still when a shadow falls across their path! When one of them is taken away we learn that solemn, ineffable love of the dead, with its strange power to purify and exalt. Yet there is a larger love still. If we have ever given our hearts to a high human cause there comes a further discovery of the wonder of love—love that is insight and sympathy, love that craves to bless the unblessed, love that can be satisfied only by giving all for all. This love walks a sorrowful way, suffers with those who suffer, 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,' and so comes to know the love of God, which is unutterable even by those who know it.

[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 217.

[1] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, 93.

Someone has said that there is a quiet little cemetery of the soul in which lie buried many of the ideas of our earlier years. Time was when we thought of God as a big man up in the sky, more stern perhaps than gentle, with two angels who set down our ill deeds. Such a God has ceased to be the living God for us, although we may often lay lovely flowers of reminiscence on His tomb. When we became men we put away childish things, and in our days of intellectualism we dealt with such huge words as the Absolute, the Ultimate, the Cosmic Consciousness, and other like high-sounding abstractions which we thought were what we wanted. The trouble was that they were unmoral or unhuman, and unless God is both moral and human He is not a living God for thirsty souls. Carlyle found no joy in his worship of 'a conflux of Eternities.' It chilled his heart.

¶ 'I cannot pray,' says Dr H. R. Mackintosh, 'to a Being who is Mind in general without being a mind: to one who is merely the aggregate of the individual minds. I cannot pray to a logical "Universal" inherent in all things but without consciousness, without purpose, without ethical character of any kind. I cannot pray to a Higher "Unity" which underlies mind and matter, without being exactly either; nor to the abstract rationality of things; nor to a general name of the laws of nature. The "God" of actually operative, contagious, and missionary religious faith is one who thinks and feels and wills and loves.'

Not until we see God as the Father of all souls —not simply 'like a Father,' as a Psalmist said, as if it were only a symbol, an analogy, but the actual Father of men, as revealed in the life of Jesus, do we behold the highest truth. There is made known what love really is in its sacrifice and redemptive power. Love is social; it cannot live alone. Such is the deep and beautiful truth of which the Trinity is the symbol—the truth of the eternal society. Older than our religion, as old as the home and the family, it is a vision of God through the home as a family in Himself. Love is creation. It cannot be inactive; it must devise order, goodness, beauty, joy. God does not love the world because He made it; He made it because He is love. Here lies the secret of the strange and haunting beauty of the world, and eternal motive behind it. Love is also providence. It cannot be content with the joy of creation, but must follow and watch over what it has made with absorbing solicitude and care. Men of old seemed to think that God made the world, set it going, and sat on the edge of it watching it. But love is never idle, much less aloof, and it must stoop to share the lot of those whom it loves.

3. Many in our day who have no difficulty in believing in God the Creator find it hard to believe in His loving care. Storms desolate the earth. War and famine fill myriad graves. Youth is blighted in its bud. Forever the cup of death is pressed to the lips of love. How can one talk of the loving care of God in face of these facts? Why did not God make a thornless world and fill it with noble men, true women, and a race just, gentle, and generous? Because He could not do it. Character cannot be created; it must be achieved. Suppose a man were to have a family created for him in an instant—a wife, a boy, a girl sitting about a table in a lovely home which he never saw before. Would it be his family? He might learn to know and love them deeply, but they would not be his family. What love cannot do God cannot do. There are methods love cannot use, acts it cannot perform, weapons it cannot employ. Divine love looks like weakness until we know what it really is, how it works, and the path it follows. Divine love is wise, and therefore takes the long look; ruling, not arbitrarily, not impatiently, but with inflexible purpose and educative discipline—permitting the prodigal to wander if he will, knowing that riotous living leads to husks, and these to the coming to himself, and to the discovery of a Love that would not let him be happy in exile!

Of love is born the hope of immortality, and the love of God is its only sure basis and token of promise. The more deeply we love wife and child and friend the more surely may we know that there is One who loves them more than we do, to whom we need not fear to commit the lives of our living and the graves of those we call the dead. Let us lay to heart the awful and wonderful truth that God loves each of us—separately, eternally—and cannot be happy without our love in return. Let us trust His love in our sorrows, our needs, our sins, knowing that love never faileth.

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